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ABSTRACT

An inquiry into Indigenous education by an Australian Senate committee examined government reports produced in 1989-99 and conducted school site visits and public hearings. During the inquiry, it became clear that educational equity for Indigenous people had not been achieved, and Indigenous participation and achievement rates lagged behind those of the non-Indigenous population in most sectors. Much of the inquiry focused on rural and remote regions, where Indigenous people have limited access to education. Chapter 1 of this report provides an overview of Indigenous educational policies, historical context, issues of self-determination and community control of schools, and educational funding. Other chapters discuss the evolution of a national Indigenous education policy; social and community issues (poverty, kinship, cultural differences, child rearing, attitudes toward schooling and work, low school attendance, racism, alcoholism, family problems, crime and imprisonment); curriculum issues (inclusion of Aboriginal culture and language, status of Aboriginal English, "two-way" education, mainstream educational reforms, use of technology); literacy education, bilingual education, and the teaching of Aboriginal languages; teacher education (lack of Indigenous teachers and staff, community-based teacher training, rural recruitment and retention, salaries, teaching conditions, specific training for teaching Indigenous students); postsecondary education (vocational education and training, adult education, higher education); impact of health on education (inadequate health care, Indigenous health problems, otitis media, community health education, malnutrition); and cultural diversity and differences in educational needs across remote, rural, and urban areas. Recommendations are presented in each chapter. Appendices list goals of the Aboriginal Education Policy, submissions received, witnesses at public hearings, site visits, and acronyms. (SV)

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Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee

Katu Kalpa - Report on the inquiry into the effectiveness of education and training programs for Indigenous Australians

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

On 9 March 1998, the following matter was referred to the Committee for inquiry.

In conducting its inquiry into the effectiveness of education and training programs for indigenous Australians, the committee:

(a) surveyed the recommendations arising over the past decade from parliamentary, government, commission and agency reports which deal with Aboriginal education and training;

(b) assessed the implementation, ongoing relevance and efficacy of recommendations which seek to raise educational achievement and to employ culturally-appropriate pedagogy to maximise participation of indigenous Australians in formal educational settings;

(c) examined the extent to which recommendations aimed at improving indigenous peoples' educational participation and achievement have been implemented by the relevant authorities, and evaluate the benefits which have flowed from them;

(d) identified any obstacles to the achievement of participation of indigenous Australians in education and training and make recommendations as to how these might be overcome;

(e) examined recent initiatives which have proven successful in improving the participation rates and levels of achievement of indigenous Australians in the national vocational education and training system;

(f) formulated advice concerning the development and management of education and training programs by indigenous Australians for indigenous Australians; and

(g) provided a comparative account of the levels of resources, both Commonwealth and State, devoted to education and training programs for indigenous Australians.

PREFACE

The inquiry into Indigenous education and training was first referred to the Committee on 9 March 1998. Progress was interrupted by the 1998 election and the reference was referred back to the Committee on 3 December 1998. As the inquiry extended over two parliaments, there were some changes in Committee membership. The Committee received 43 submissions and conducted public hearings as well as inspections and site visits in four states and both territories. A list of submissions received and of witnesses who appeared before the Committee at its public hearings appear as appendices to this report.

Over the past decade a number of parliamentary, government and commission inquiries have made recommendations on Indigenous education and training. These include the Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (1988), the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991), and the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1995). The Committee was asked to review parliamentary, government and commission reports on Indigenous education and training during the past ten years, assess the recommendations made in these reports and investigate the extent to which action had been taken to address them.

One of the most significant initiatives undertaken in the past decade in relation to Indigenous education and training was the introduction of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) in 1989. The NATSIEP was a national policy jointly developed by the states and territories and the Commonwealth. The central goal of the NATSIEP was 'to achieve broad equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes in all forms of education.'[1]

In the course of the inquiry, it became clear to the Committee that equity for Indigenous people in most educational sectors had not been achieved. At almost all levels, educational participation and achievement rates for Indigenous people remained behind those of the non-Indigenous population. However, it was also clear that there had been substantial progress in a range of areas, with some major improvements in Indigenous educational participation. These included increases in Year 12 completion and in participation in vocational education and training. The period also saw an appreciable increase in educational participation by mature age Indigenous students. The record, therefore, has been mixed, with continued failure in some areas and partial success in others.

The past ten years have also seen significant developments in Indigenous affairs generally. These developments include the Mabo and Wik decisions on native title,

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1 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement*, Canberra, 1989, p. 9

the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry into the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families, and continuing efforts towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In the broader social context the decade saw developments in information technology which have the potential to link remote communities into the wider community in ways which were not previously available. The decade also saw a growing body of academic literature and research on Indigenous education. Much of this research has informed educational practice at both the local and national level. Indigenous education has also been influenced by moves towards self determination in Indigenous communities, and the desire of Indigenous communities to have more control over their own affairs.

Many of these changes were reflected in debates over Indigenous education and training which the Committee encountered in the course of the inquiry. Central issues in Indigenous education such as the role of bilingual instruction, aboriginal learning styles, 'two way' education, and Indigenous participation in educational decision making were brought to the attention of the Committee in various locations. One example was the decision in early 1999 of the Northern Territory Education Department to phase out supplementary funding for Indigenous bilingual programs in government schools. The announcement sparked a heated debate over the role of bilingual programs and the level of commitment of Australian governments to Indigenous education. Other important issues considered by the Committee included school attendance, literacy and numeracy, and teacher training.

The numerous government inquiries and commissions into Indigenous education and training over the last ten years have resulted in a range of recommendations. In some instances, these have been backed up by government programs and funding initiatives. At the community level, many initiatives have been put in place which have sought to build on a growing understanding of how indigenous people learn and interact with an essentially non-indigenous educational system. The inquiry took stock of some of these developments.

At the national level, the Committee examined many of the reports into Indigenous education and training that were conducted during this period. A major focus was on the recommendations and the extent to which they were successfully implemented. Of necessity, this required the Committee to focus on those reports and inquiries considered to be the most significant. In this process, the Committee was guided by the advice provided in submissions and public hearings. However, the Committee is aware of the selective nature of its work and the fact that some important reports may have received less attention than others.

A key part of the inquiry involved identifying recent initiatives that had proven successful in improving educational achievement for Indigenous Australians. The public hearings provided an opportunity for the Committee to gain first hand information on educational issues and initiatives at the local level. The level of diversity of the Indigenous population suggests that many educational needs are best tackled at the local level. One of the areas investigated in the hearings was local

responses to educational concerns and the factors that support or hinder these responses.

The Committee was also asked to compare the level of state, territory and Commonwealth resources devoted to education and training programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders over the last decade. Work on this indicated that reliable information on which to base comparisons was difficult to get, and that there were difficulties in making useful comparisons because states and territories use different measurement indicators. The Committee has made some recommendations in this area aimed at improving reporting on expenditure on Indigenous education. The extent of Commonwealth and state or territory involvement in the various educational sectors was an important issue here. The Commonwealth has only a limited role in program delivery. Many submissions to the inquiry raised issues that were largely state responsibilities. The Committee has recommended that a number of these issues be referred to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

Much of the inquiry concentrated on the compulsory years of schooling because of the relatively low numbers of Indigenous students who complete secondary education. However, vocational education and training, adult education and higher education are assuming greater importance and were subject to some controversy as to content relevance and control. Similarly, much of the inquiry focussed on rural and remote regions. Indigenous people in these regions experience considerable difficulties in gaining access to education. Some of these issues were raised with the Committee. However, a large proportion of Indigenous people also live in urban locations. Their educational needs were also investigated, although the Committee was regrettably unable to visit any Indigenous schools in large urban areas. Health issues were addressed in many submissions and also in the public hearings and inspections.

In the course of conducting the inquiry, the Committee was made aware of the complex inter-relationships involved in addressing Indigenous educational needs. This was most strongly felt in relation to health, social and community development, and the diverse nature of Indigenous populations. These factors have a strong impact on levels of educational participation and achievement in Indigenous communities, and are in turn influenced by the educational levels of Indigenous peoples. Perhaps the strongest message to come out of the Committee's hearings was the need for holistic approaches that involve action across a range of areas. Educational improvements on their own stand little chance of success without improvements in health care, social and community well-being, and general living conditions. Progress in all areas depends fundamentally on the involvement of Indigenous communities. However, the support of government agencies working cooperatively to provide an appropriate and sensitive 'whole of government' approach is essential to this process.

Senator Jacinta Collins
Chair

RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter One

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA ensure that raising of literacy and numeracy skills of Indigenous students to the level obtained by non-indigenous students remains an urgent national priority.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends to MCEETYA that agreement be reached on the uniform tabulation of expenditure on Indigenous education in all states and territories.

Chapter Two

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) programs should be retained as centrally funded programs administered by DETYA.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that DETYA investigate ways of providing greater flexibility in the use of discretionary funds, including funding for regional projects and direct funding for schools.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that a comprehensive review of the NATSIEP be undertaken in 2002, at the end of the fourth triennium of operation.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth, state and territory policies and strategies be developed and delivered in a context that recognises, and takes full account of, the cultural history, identity, diversity and continuing educational disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends the appointment of an independent national consultative body to advise MCEETYA on indigenous education needs and policy; this body to include representatives of ATSIC and the Indigenous education consultative bodies that already advise state and territory education ministers.

Chapter Three

Recommendation 8

The Committee commends DETYA for the development of a national Indigenous school attendance strategy and recommends that all necessary resources be supplied as a matter of urgency to enable its prompt implementation.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA facilitate discussions with Commonwealth and state agencies to coordinate initiatives to improve the participation rates and educational outcomes of Indigenous communities.

Chapter Four

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that coordinated strategies aimed at improving access to secondary education in remote communities be investigated by an independent national consultative body on Indigenous education established by MCEETYA.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends MCEETYA give renewed emphasis to the provision of pre-schools for remote communities.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA develop a coordinated consultative national approach to ensure that culturally appropriate best practice informs all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training needs.

Recommendation 13

The Committee notes the interest of ATSIC in exploring the potential for expansion of computer-aided learning for Indigenous people in remote communities and recommends that the Minister initiate a pilot project to trial the use of satellite or microwave based internet technology.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that a set of national participation goals and outcomes be developed by DETYA for the education and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and that these cover the spectrum of lifelong learning with specific and designated responsibilities being allocated to the Commonwealth and to states and territories.

Chapter Five

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that support for bilingual education programs be maintained in those areas where they are seen as appropriate and necessary by Indigenous communities.

Chapter Six

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends to MCEETYA the development of appropriate performance indicators for monitoring the employment of Indigenous people in education.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the Minister initiate a pilot project in an appropriate university for the purpose of delivering teacher education programs via satellite or microwave Internet technology to Indigenous trainee teachers in remote communities.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA review incentives to attract and retain experienced teachers in remote areas and in schools with a large proportion of Indigenous students, and to consider the introduction of remote area teaching scholarships.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA implement a strategy that provides an appropriate career and salary structure for AIEWs in all the states and territories and that provides for consistency in pay and conditions across the states and territories. It further recommends that AIEWs be given incentives to gain full teaching qualifications.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA look at ways of improving incentives to encourage experienced and accomplished teachers to accept appointments in schools with a high proportion of Indigenous students, and especially in remote areas.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that university schools and faculties of education address more effectively the need to provide trainee teachers with a much stronger grounding in theory and practice relating to the teaching of Indigenous children, including ESL.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that MCEETYA draw up guidelines for improved induction courses for teachers posted to schools with significant Indigenous enrolments, including those teachers who are appointed to positions during the course of a year.

Chapter Seven

Recommendation 23

Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the ANTA Act be amended to ensure that capital works funding for independent education providers goes directly to institutions.

Recommendation 24

The Committee recommends that all governments recognise in their policies, educational structures and funding allocation, the central role that adult education providers and their programs play in Indigenous development.

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that DETYA monitor and report on the impact of the changes to Abstudy to come into effect in 2000, and particularly their impact on mature age and rural and remote students.

Recommendation 26

The Committee recommends that policy makers take into account the particular needs of Indigenous students in post-compulsory education and provide appropriate levels of support for these students.

Recommendation 27

The Committee recommends that funding directed towards higher education institutions for the purposes of Indigenous education should be adequate to ensure effective and appropriate educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Chapter Eight

Recommendation 28

The Committee recommends that more funding be targeted towards flexible community development and self-management schemes aimed at improving standards of health in Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 29

The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Ministers and state governments undertake immediate action through ministerial councils to coordinate programs to improve community health, including:

- identifying linkages between education and health care initiatives;
- providing maternal, baby and early childhood health care;
- teacher education to identify and deal with hearing impairments and other health issues in the classroom;
- accelerating the training of more community health workers in Indigenous communities;
- improving Indigenous access to specialist services and community health education programs;
- encouragement of community efforts to improve nutritional standards through education and community purchasing and cultivation initiatives; and
- improving provision of school based health education.

Chapter Nine

Recommendation 30

The Committee recommends that MCEETA look at the Northern Territory Community Care Information System's potential for other parts of Australia.

Recommendation 31

The Committee recommends that responsibility for school programs and overall administration be devolved to school communities where appropriate; that this include financial self-management; and that assistance be given to local communities in developing a culture of management accountability for decisions made in their name.

Recommendation 32

The Committee recommends that funds under special purpose grants be provided to schools over a triennium.

Recommendation 33

The Committee recommends that DETYA guidelines allow for flexible use of ASSPA funding to allow school communities to apply grants that fit local educational programs most appropriately.

Recommendation 34

The Committee recommends that the Minister initiate through MCEETYA a review of current processes for determining the allocation of capital works grants to schools with a substantial Indigenous enrolment.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 In March 1998 the Committee was asked by the Senate to inquire into and report on the effectiveness of education and training programs for Indigenous Australians over the past ten years. The Committee received 43 submissions from all states and territories. It also visited schools and other educational institutions, and had both formal hearings and less formal discussions with a range of people connected with Indigenous education in four states and the territories. This introductory chapter is intended to cover some of the main findings and conclusions of the Committee as well as some of the matters on which the evidence was not conclusive and which may only be referred to briefly in the report.

1.2 The terms of reference included the requirement for the Committee to survey the most important reports published over that time which have made recommendations on the education of Indigenous people, and to make an assessment of the extent of their implementation. In general, it can be stated that recommendations have been easier to make than to implement. In a federal system of government, priorities vary from state to state and national implementation of recommendations often depends on state perceptions of how serious a problem appears. Only some of the recommendations on education made by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody have been implemented, partly because of these jurisdictional differences.

1.3 The introduction of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) in 1989 was one of the most important initiatives undertaken in the past decade in relation to Indigenous education. The NATSIEP was a national policy jointly developed by the states and territories and the Commonwealth. It was one of the principal recommendations of the 1988 Hughes report, a case where report recommendations were adopted. The central goal of the NATSIEP was 'to achieve broad equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes in all forms of education'.[1]

1.4 In 1999 it is clear that equity for Indigenous people in most educational sectors has not yet been achieved and may still be some way off. However, it is also clear that there has been considerable progress in a number of areas, with major improvements in many levels of Indigenous educational participation. The record, therefore, is mixed, with continued failure in some areas and partial success in others. This report draws attention to the successes, and to the difficulties that often seem

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1 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement*, Canberra, 1989, p. 9

beyond the power of governments to overcome in the quest for improved educational outcomes, but which need to be systematically addressed.

The Indigenous population

1.5 In Australia in 1996 the Indigenous population numbered around 390,000, making up about two per cent of the Australian population. Compared to the non-Indigenous population, the Indigenous population was more heavily concentrated in younger age groups.[2]

1.6 Indigenous Australians represent a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds, from the peoples of the Torres Strait Islands to those of Central Australia. This diversity needs to be remembered in examining educational issues and needs. Some Indigenous people are located in remote communities while others live in urban locations. This report is not exceptional in devoting most of its attention to remote and rural dwelling Indigenous people, but this overlooks the fact that the majority of Indigenous people live in or around large provincial and metropolitan centres. The Committee received few submissions from Indigenous groups in capital cities, and the Committee's inability to visit Indigenous education institutions in some capital cities is regrettable.

1.7 The majority of Indigenous people in Australia (about 80 per cent) speak only English. However, in the Northern Territory just over 60 per cent of Indigenous people also speak an Indigenous language, or Aboriginal English and have varying levels of English proficiency.[3] English is a second language for many of these people, and for many Indigenous people in remote areas in other parts of Australia. Levels of literacy among Indigenous people are higher in provincial and metropolitan cities than they are in rural and remote areas. In this respect Indigenous education reflects a national trend which applies to the whole population. So much concern about educational achievement centres on levels of literacy, and so it is appropriate that this report concentrates on sections of the Indigenous population less likely to use Standard English.

Educational participation of Indigenous peoples

1.8 At almost all levels, educational participation and achievement rates for Indigenous people remain behind those of the non-Indigenous population. Retention rates to year 12 are around 30 per cent compared to over 70 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians. In 1997 the higher education award course completion rate for non-Indigenous students was almost double that for Indigenous students (24 per cent compared to 14 per cent).

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2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Population Distribution, Indigenous Australians*, ABS, Canberra, 1996, cat. no. 4705.0, p. 13

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, ABS, Canberra, 1996, cat. no. 2034.0, p. 85

1.9 However, there have been improvements in Indigenous educational participation over the past ten years. While retention rates are still low, year 12 retention has increased significantly from 12 per cent in 1989 to 31 per cent in 1997. Between 1986 and 1996 the school participation rate for Indigenous people aged 16 to 17 years increased by 40 per cent. Although these increases appear to have slowed in more recent years, they represent considerable progress. Similarly, between 1988 and 1996 the number of Indigenous higher education students more than doubled, while the number of higher education award course completions increased by threefold, to nearly 1,000.

1.10 In the vocational education and training (VET) sector Indigenous participation rates now more closely match those of the non-Indigenous population in all age groups except for the 18 to 20 year age group. A lack of reliable historical data in the VET sector makes it difficult to examine changes over time. However, there appears to have been a dramatic increase in participation. Indigenous students now comprise 3 per cent of the total number of enrolments in the VET sector, higher than their proportion of the population.[4] In general, it must be said that Indigenous people in both the higher education and VET sector are

> Under-represented in many VET course areas that are of particular relevance to them, such as 'business, administration and economics', and they continue to be over-represented in other areas such as 'general (multi-field) education' courses and in lower level Certificate II programs.[5]

> Higher proportions of the Indigenous population are studying non-award courses. As the recent NCVER report, *Creating a Sense of Place: Indigenous peoples in vocational education and training*, points out, TAFE institutes have been generally successful in creating secure and supportive learning environment for Indigenous students. The new challenge is to build on this success by having Indigenous students access mainstream study support facilities.[6]

1.11 This is by far the best indicator of an improvement in both participation and outcomes for Indigenous adult education. The Committee believes that this increasingly strong interest in vocational education may be a springboard to renewed interest in education among Indigenous youth, and lifelong learning generally. In this respect the expectation for vocational education as a solution to underachievement does no more than reflect a hope that is held for the education of all underachieving youth, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. As previous inquiries of this Committee have shown, the VET component of the mainstream secondary school curriculum has expanded considerably over the past five years.

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4 Chris Robinson and Paul Hughes, *Creating a Sense of Place: Indigenous People in Vocational Education and Training*, NCVER, Kensington Park, 1999, p. xi

5 *ibid.*, p. xii

6 *ibid.*, p.57-59

1.12 Recent developments in information technology have the potential to link remote communities into the wider community in ways which were not previously available. The Committee received evidence in a number of places about the positive spirit in which Indigenous young people were accepting new technologies and using them effectively. The medium of computer technology was claimed to be particularly appealing to Indigenous youth, who often exhibit an affinity with visual technologies.[7]

1.13 In regard to age, the most significant increases in Indigenous educational participation have taken place among mature age students. Educational participation rates among Indigenous people aged over 30 years are now higher than among the non-Indigenous population. Adult education has become increasingly important as a result. The lowest rates of increase in post compulsory educational participation have been among Indigenous people aged 16 to 24 years.

1.14 There remain significant concerns about levels of literacy in the Indigenous population, with a perception in some quarters that literacy levels among younger Indigenous people have been declining in recent years. This may be the case in the Northern Territory and some remote areas of the states. According to a recent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, 'Many Indigenous people shared their concern that today's students have fewer and less well-developed literacy skills than the generation before them'[8]. However, it is not reflected in the data available from national surveys. These show a slight but steady improvement in literacy rates overall among Indigenous people, possibly reflecting the urban experience.

1.15 While any improvement is encouraging, Indigenous literacy improvement remains a formidable challenge. The Committee acknowledges the complex social and pedagogical factors involved in raising Indigenous numeracy and literacy standards - from earlier and better access to pre-school and school, to health issues and family and addressing community problems which result in disadvantage to children and their education. The Committee considers this issue to be of such vital importance that it warrants renewed effort from all levels of government and the Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 1

1.16 The Committee recommends that MCEETYA ensure that raising of literacy and numeracy skills of Indigenous students to the level obtained by non-indigenous students remains an urgent national priority.

The historical context

1.17 The ten years since 1989 have seen important developments in Indigenous affairs. There have been changes in government at the Commonwealth level and in all

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7 Kalgoorlie District Education Office, *Hansard Precis*, Kalgoorlie, 15 September 1999

8 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, p. 117

States, and changes in government policy on Indigenous issues. There have also been the Mabo and Wik decisions in regard to native title, as well as a range of government inquiries and initiatives in regard to Indigenous education and training, and Indigenous affairs more generally.

1.18 The 1988 Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force, chaired by Professor Paul Hughes, led to the formulation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) in 1989. A major review of the National Policy was undertaken in 1994, chaired by Manduwuy Yunupingu. The final report of the review was presented in 1995. In response to the review, the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments reaffirmed their commitment to the NATSIEP goals and restated these goals in the 1995 MCEETYA National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002.

1.19 The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs produced two separate reports in 1989 and 1990 after inquiring into the effectiveness of existing support services within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, including administrative and advisory services. The first, *A Chance for the Future: Training in Skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Community Management and Development* made forty-nine recommendations in total, the majority of which have not been implemented. In the case of the Northern Territory, one submission detailed an erosion of adult education and training services to Indigenous communities over the ten year period, diminishing the means for the recommendations to be effectively implemented.[9] The report's discussion about community development and planning is as relevant today as it was in 1989. The second report, *Our Future Our Selves: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Control – Management and Resources,* explores concepts such as self-determination, self-management, and community control, as well as the difference between consultation and negotiation. Both reports still have relevance, particularly in relation to issues of self determination, community development, and community control and management of schools, particularly in remote areas.

1.20 The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody examined educational issues in relation to high rates of incarceration of Indigenous people. Again, self-determination featured prominently, particularly in relation to the delivery of appropriate services, including education and training. Again there have been concerns over the level of commitment of governments to implementing the recommendations.

> There has been inadequate regard to a key recommendation on the need for negotiation and self-determination in relation to the design and delivery of services. A failure to comprehend the centrality of this recommendation has

9 Submission No. 4, Mr Peter Toyne MLA, vol. 1, p. 25

negatively impacted on the implementation of a range of other recommendations.[10]

1.21 In 1994, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs tabled a report, *Justice Under Scrutiny*, on its inquiry into the implementation by governments of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Self-determination is described in the report as a 'broad intent' to empower Indigenous people, in turn described as 'the desire and capacity' to 'exercise, according to circumstances, maximum control over their own lives and that of their communities'[11]. This Committee believes that education and training is central to ensuring communities have this capacity to be self-determining.

1.22 While the House of Representatives committee report did not examine government responses to the specific recommendations contained in the Commission Report's section on Aboriginal prisoner education, the importance of monitoring the implementation of its recommendations was stressed [12]. In particular, the Standing Committee was critical of the monitoring mechanisms that had been put in place, and the limited involvement of Indigenous people in the implementation process.[13]

1.23 In May 1997 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission released the report *Bringing Them Home*, which examined the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. One submission to the current inquiry asks the Committee to note its formal apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for the role that educators and schools had in the removal of Indigenous children from their families.[14]

1.24 Other relevant reports include a House of Representatives inquiry into the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in 1992, and a 1992 Schools Council review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education from preschool to year 5. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's *Rural and Remote Education Inquiry* Report will be completed in 2000, and will have recommendations relating to Indigenous education.

1.25 A number of government programs in Indigenous education were introduced at the Commonwealth level in response to these inquiries. These included programs such as the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program (ASSPA), the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS), and the Vocational and Educational

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10 Chris Cunneen and David McDonald, *Keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Out of Custody*, ATSIC, Canberra, 1997

11 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Justice Under Scrutiny*, Canberra, 1994, p. 11

12 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *National Report*, vol. 3, recommendations 184-187 inclusive

13 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Justice Under Scrutiny*, Canberra, 1994, p. 11

14 Submission 24, Australian Education Union, vol. 2, p. 121

Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme (VEGAS). Some of these programs have been evaluated in recent years. The Commonwealth also administers the Aboriginal Student Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY), which has gone through a number of changes in the past decade, and the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP).

1.26 There have also been various inquiries into Indigenous education at the state and territory levels. Most state and territory governments have introduced specific educational programs for Indigenous people. The past decade has seen a growing body of academic literature and research into Indigenous education. Much of this research has informed educational practice at both the local and national level. Programs of bilingual instruction and 'two way' education, for example, have been influenced by research into Aboriginal learning styles and the importance of cultural issues in Indigenous education.

Self-determination, and community control of schools

1.27 Self-determination and the need for Indigenous control or ownership of education has been one of the central recommendations for Indigenous educational policy over the last ten years. The Committee received evidence of strong links between Indigenous aspirations for education and self-determination, but also found that the ideal of self-determination has presented problems in implementation.

1.28 Cultural diversity affects self -determination. It can manifest as control of Indigenous schools in remote areas, or Indigenous parental involvement in decision making in a metropolitan mainstream school. It depends very much on geography and the proportion of Indigenous people in a particular region. It also depends very much on the social, cultural and political dynamics of communities, the sense of identification Indigenous people feel for their land, and the relationships they have with land councils and other representative bodies and organisations. This varies greatly across the country. The views of ATSIC were made known to the Committee in a submission as well as oral evidence.

> ATSIC also believes that it is important that the inquiry appreciates a point made by numerous inquiries over many years – that educational outcomes are closely linked to the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can exercise control over education policy and programs. ATSIC believes that progress towards improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination at all levels of the educational system has not been as rapid or as comprehensive as it should have.[15]

1.29 The Committee also heard the views of the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers, who provided energetic support for Indigenous autonomy in the running of educational institutions. The Committee remains unclear about the practical implementation of the vision of 'Indigenised' schools proposed, and about concrete proposals Indigenous groups may have about running such

15 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 118

schools, especially when the social, cultural, and political dynamics of communities vary markedly across the country. However, there are many good examples mentioned later in this report of Indigenous schools that have demonstrated self-determination in their organisation and programs. These schools offer ideas and choices for the future.

1.30 The relevance and need for Indigenous self-determination in education is borne out by the report of the review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory carried out by former Territory senator, the Hon Bob Collins. The report of this review, referred to from here on by its title, *Learning Lessons*, was commissioned by the Northern Territory Government. It reviewed curriculum and teaching practice, community relations and administration, and finance and human resources issues. The report describes a breakdown in trust and confidence on a large scale. The administrative neglect and the misallocation of Commonwealth funds described in *Learning Lessons* are symptomatic of wider problems, which may only be overcome by assisting Indigenous people to assume increased levels of responsibility for the education of their children, where that is their choice.

1.31 While all submissions supported increased Indigenous involvement in educational administration, some were critical of the way in which this had been applied in the past. One submission pointed to a simplistic approach to 'self-management' which had seen Aboriginal staff appointed to managerial positions on minimal qualifications or experience and then being left to fend for themselves.[16] Some attempts by governments to institutionalise models of self-determination were said to have been nothing more than setting Indigenous organisations up for failure. At the practical level, self-determination undoubtedly requires a delicate balance between Indigenous aspiration and direction on the one hand and specialist assistance at appropriate levels and times on the other.

1.32 If Papunya School near Alice Springs is to be a model, and it has received praise in *Learning Lessons* for its efforts in building community leadership and involvement in school life, then the model is fairly straight forward. Teachers and running costs are the responsibility of the government, while decisions about curriculum and school programs generally are the shared responsibility of the community and the Department of Education. The Papunya community has worked hard to achieve a large measure of community control, presumably overcoming the hurdle of 'red tape' described below.

1.33 The ATSIC submission noted improvements in the running of schools in many areas, including government schools, which were beginning to reflect community concerns more closely in their curriculum and teaching strategies. Nonetheless, ATSIC remained concerned about the obstacles faced by independent Aboriginal schools in gaining accreditation and funding.[17] ATSIC claimed that the

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16 Submission No. 7, Mr Peter Reynolds, vol. 1, p. 53

17 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 136

process of Aboriginalisation had become such a bureaucratised process in the Northern Territory that it actually increased the control of the Northern Territory Education Department over Aboriginal schools.[18]

1.34 The Committee made some attempts to find out about the practicalities of implementing self-determination. ATSIC representatives were asked at a public hearing whether an independent Indigenous school sector, analogous to Catholic systemic schools, would be an appropriate response to the need for Indigenous community controlled schools. ATSIC appeared reluctant to accept this analogy, pointing out the difficulties that such a model would create in mixed communities.[19] The Committee understands this concern. Community controlled schools, like Papunya School described elsewhere, are likely to run successfully in resilient remote and rural communities with high proportions of Indigenous people, but may face problems elsewhere. The Committee also found, however, that even in some metropolitan schools Indigenous students were likely to travel across several suburbs to attend a particular state school. Often such schools were unofficially recognised as 'Koorie schools' because of their high proportion of Indigenous students. Some Indigenous parents, on the other hand, continue to prefer mainstream schooling. Diversity of culture requires diversity of choice.

1.35 It is worth noting two successful models of Indigenous community control which have been the subject of some investigation by the Committee.

1.36 The best known Indigenous controlled institutions are the community-controlled adult education and VET colleges affiliated with the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers. The oldest of these, Tranby College in Glebe, was established in 1958. The Committee visited Tauondi College in Port Adelaide, another affiliated college, which is referred to later in this report. A recent NCVER report shows students attending independent colleges, generally from highly disadvantaged backgrounds, achieved better pass rates than did Indigenous students enrolled at mainstream TAFE colleges.[20] The surveys also indicated that the employment prospects for graduates were surprisingly good, at 36 per cent within four months of completion of courses. This is a low figure from one perspective, and is well below rates for non-Indigenous people who have completed VET courses, but it is a very high figure when looked at in the light of Indigenous employment rates overall.

1.37 There are also a number of Aboriginal community controlled schools in operation around the country. Although the Committee did not have the opportunity to visit any community controlled schools, it was made aware of their importance during

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18 *ibid.*, p. 147

19 Mr Lewis Hawke, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 323

20 Deborah Durnan and Bob Boughton, *Succeeding Against the Odds: The outcomes attained by Indigenous students in Aboriginal community-controlled adult education colleges*, NCVER, Kensington Park, SA, 1999, pp. ix-xi

its hearings and visits. The community controlled schools have been particularly important in Western Australia, where there are a total of thirteen non-government non-Catholic Aboriginal independent schools. The thirteen schools form a loosely affiliated group within the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. To be regarded as a member the school must have either majority Aboriginal membership of its governing body or full involvement by Aboriginal community members in its development. The first community school was established in Western Australia in 1976. The schools include the Aboriginal-controlled Christian schools as well as remote area community controlled schools. While the thirteen schools each have their own ethos, they share 'a commitment to Aboriginal control and the maintenance of the world views and values of the respective communities'.[21] The goals of language and cultural maintenance have been a strong motivating factor for some of these schools. Rawa Community School, for example, located on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert, has a two way learning philosophy which aims to prepare students to enter the mainstream world (if they choose) and also to keep the Martu people's culture and language alive.[22]

1.38 The relationship between Indigenous control of a school and its continuing denominational affiliation was not fully explored by the Committee. There is some evidence to suggest that in areas currently or formerly controlled by missions, schools have enjoyed a great deal of latitude in implementing policies sympathetic to ideals of self-determination, usually because this is consistent with current religious attitudes. This is the case with Catholic schools of the Diocese of the Northern Territory in places like Bathurst Island. It is also true of a number of schools conducted by Indigenous bodies affiliated to various Protestant denominations across northern Australia. Not all of these trace their origins back to colonial times, though they build on a long-established tradition.

1.39 For instance, Shalom Christian College in Townsville began in 1992 as an initiative of the Aboriginal and Islander Uniting Church Congress, a national body of the Uniting Church. This independent, co-educational College offers an educational program from preschool to Year 12, as well as a boarding house which draws Indigenous students from the Torres Strait and other parts of Queensland. The College is adopting the 'scaffolding' approach to literacy mentioned favourably at Yipirinya School in Alice Springs. Although both the primary and secondary areas each have a principal, they report to the governing body of the Congress, Community Development and Education Limited, an incorporated non-profit organisation. Shalom Christian College is part of a network of community interests which includes the Shalom Elders Village, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre, the Crystal Creek conference centre and camp site, the Yalga-binbi Institute for Community Development and Education Unit, and Shalom Development Services, the construction arm of the Congress. All interact for the benefit of the Indigenous

21 http://wisdom.psinet.net.au/~aiswa/aics.htm

22 http://www.users.bigpond.com/rawa/raawa14.htm

Uniting Church community, although Yalga-binbi operates fee-for-service activities in community development, education and training for a wide range of government agencies and other Indigenous community organisations. Congress members have adopted a community development approach suited to their needs and aspirations, where all the above activities are administered individually, but operate on an interdependent basis. The school also operates within this wider community context.

1.40 Despite agreement with the self-determination principle, two recent government decisions were undertaken without consultation with Indigenous people - the 1997 changes to Abstudy and the decision of the Northern Territory government to phase out funding for bilingual education. Whatever the educational merits of the decisions, the way in which they were reached showed a marked lack of regard for the central principles of Indigenous involvement in educational policy making established under the National Policy.

Indigenous education funding

1.41 Funding of Indigenous education remains the primary responsibility of the states and territories, except in the independent sector. The Commonwealth supplements these funds in the form of special purpose grants. Complaints about the administration of special purpose grants were heard by the Committee in Cairns and Alice Springs, as detailed in Chapter 8. A table showing Commonwealth funding since 1991 is presented below.

1.42 Table 1 shows that there was a steady increase in Commonwealth funding for Indigenous education since the NATSIEP was introduced in 1990. Although there were some fluctuations in individual years, the general trend was upwards. The Commonwealth also provided untied grants to the states and territories. These were used either as core funding by the states or as special grants on the Commonwealth model. As the table below indicates, it is not possible to ascertain the extent to which states and territories have followed expenditure trends for Indigenous education overall. Advice received from states and territories indicates that there is only a tenuous basis for comparing the expenditure performances of the states and territories even on a per capita basis.

1.43 The DETYA submission to the inquiry pointed to the problem of having no nationally aggregated data on Indigenous education.[23] In attempting to compile information on Indigenous education expenditure from the states and territories, the Committee saw firsthand evidence of this fact. The lack of readily available state and territory based data makes any state and territory expenditure comparison questionable as it is impossible to ascertain whether figures rendered are comparing like with like. Given the increased national and international interest in Indigenous affairs, the Committee considers this to be a problem worthy of immediate attention.

23 Submission No. 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, vol.4, p. 52

Recommendation 2

1.44 The Committee recommends to MCEETYA that agreement be reached on the uniform tabulation of expenditure on Indigenous education in all states and territories.

1.45 The importance of this recommendation should be clear from recent information on the record of the Northern Territory Government's failure to manage its education budget according to accepted norms of probity in relation to Commonwealth grants.

Table 1: Commonwealth Expenditure on Indigenous Education

Program/Outcome	91-92 $'000	92-93 $'000	93-94 $'000	94-95 $'000	95-96 $'000	96-97 $'000	97-98 $'000	98-99 $'000
Indigenous Education (Supplementary Assistance) Act 1989 [AESIP]	66 123	75 331	81 305	87 655	83 872	80 298	129 519	123 536
ABSTUDY	44 038	106 330	111 773	114 282	128 490	131 694	129 889	130 498
Special Employment Education and Income Support								
Indigenous Education Direct Assistance	26 283	37 091	34 540	43 096	51 353	48 606	58 356	60 189
Aboriginal Employment Education Assistance	317	959	291					
Overseas study grants for Aboriginals	207	181	383	345	188			
Totals - $ '000	**$136 968**	**$219 892**	**$228 292**	**$201 937**	**$263 903**	**$260 598**	**$317 764**	**$314 223**

Source: DEET, DEETYA, and DETYA Annual Reports

Table 2. Comparative account of levels of resources devoted to education and training programs for Indigenous Australians by state and territory, 1988-89 to 1998-99.[24]

Year	State or Territory							
	NSW $ (m)	TAS[25] $ (m)	VIC[26] $ (m)	SA[27] $ (m)	WA $ (m)	QLD $ (m)	NT[28] $ (m)	ACT $ (m)
1988-89	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.30	N/A	N/A	N/A
1989-90	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.04	N/A	N/A	N/A
1990-91	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.04	3.0	N/A	0.20
1991-92	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.04	3.2	N/A	0.29
1992-93	N/A	N/A	N/A	13.79	0.04	2.8	N/A	0.52
1993-94	N/A	0.20	N/A	14.14	0.36	3.1	N/A	0.56
1994-95	2.67	0.22	N/A	16.90	0.40	3.5	79.5	0.59
1995-96	13.10	0.26	N/A	16.37	0.44	3.6	79.5	0.61
1996-97	13.59	0.27	N/A	18.34	0.63	4.6	79.5	0.56
1997-98	13.93[29]	0.29	8.5	18.24	1.3	7.2	79.5	N/A
1998-99	14.78	N/A	9.1	N/A	1.5	8.0	79.5	N/A

24 Amounts have been rounded. Where possible, any known differences in composition of these figures are specified in the footnotes. Caution should be used in making comparisons between the states or territories.

25 Expenditure on Indigenous programs. Figures do not include administration costs.

26 Funds allocated to specific Indigenous education initiatives. Expenditure does not include allocations made from school global budgets.

27 Figures do not include salary related on-costs, depreciation of assets, corporate services, country incentives, workers' compensation or teacher housing costs.

28 Expenditure on Indigenous school students taken only from the Northern Territory Public Accounts Committee Report Number 27, *Report on the Provision of School Education Services for Remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory*, p. 3. Figures are for 1994-95 only. However, expenditure for the other years is based on information provided by the Northern Territory Department of Education which indicated that after 1994-95 'in general terms ...there had been no decrease...in funding allocated to the education of Indigenous students (Fong, 1998).'

29 Figures for 1997-98 and 1998-99 are estimates.

1.46 The Committee's own interest in this matter was in establishing the reasons for official neglect of the needs of one school it visited, Papunya School. Questions were asked about why the Territory Government failed to pass on the Commonwealth funds allocated to schools. As *Learning Lessons* revealed, the Department of Education failed to access Commonwealth funds to the full extent that they were available, and it was later learned that the Department had misallocated $90 million of Commonwealth supplementary Indigenous education funding to its core funding.[30] The Committee had long been aware of the unease within DETYA about accountability by the Northern Territory Education Department for the use of Commonwealth funds. A document cited in the Senate confirms the NT Department's recognition of this 'long-troubled relationship' due to a 'systemic lack of interest in Aboriginal Education'.[31]

Culturally appropriate pedagogies

1.47 Curriculum controversies appear to be more of a preoccupation with academics and activist groups than with classroom teachers, who will often say that they are more concerned with practice than with theory and assess the value of content and method on whether it works in the classroom. The Committee is aware that there is a tension between those who argue in favour of educational programs for Indigenous Australians which place strong emphasis on English language and numerical skills (that is, workplace preparation skills) and those who give a high priority to educational programs which value Indigenous identity, issues and world views. The Committee shares the general belief that these two positions are not mutually exclusive, and that good teaching will achieve both objectives.

1.48 The matter of culturally appropriate pedagogy extends well beyond the question of how to present information about Australian history. Remote, rural and urban schools will, by necessity of their diverse circumstances, address this issue in a variety of ways. It has been argued that the decision of the Northern Territory Education Department to phase out bilingual education will reduce the capacity of schools to provide culturally appropriate schooling for Indigenous people. Others oppose this view. Curriculum specialists, however, in nearly all cases, favour 'both ways' and bilingual learning, when appropriately resourced, or locally developed pedagogies which build on the unique circumstances of a particular locality, such as Martin Nakata argues for the Torres Strait. No one argues for culturally appropriate pedagogies at the expense of standards or accountability. One submission linked high rates of truancy by Indigenous students to culturally inappropriate pedagogy.[32] More weighty evidence has been provided that suggests that good teaching in basic skills by teachers who form positive relationships with students and parents is what Indigenous people value most.

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30 Senate, *Hansard*, 22 November 1999, p. 10262-3

31 *ibid.*, p. 10263

32 Submission No. 4, Mr Peter Toyne MLA, vol. 1, p. 23

1.49 More recently, two way education has been subject to criticism. These criticisms centre on instances where priority appears to have been given to cultural maintenance over acquisition of basic skills such as English language literacy and numeracy. This is not what two way learning is about. Ideally, two way learning accords equal priority to European and Indigenous knowledge. Some writers have also pointed to tensions between 'the politics of recognition' and 'the politics of distribution', arguing that policies of recognition and self determination can sometimes conflict with concerns over levels of Indigenous disadvantage.[33]

1.50 Cultural sensitivity is undoubtedly important because Indigenous children learn better if it evident in the teaching style. On the other hand, good teaching introduces new ideas and cultures. It shows an inappropriate respect for Indigenous culture to maintain it in an anthropological cocoon. Torres Strait Islander academic, Dr Martin Nakata, quoted elsewhere in this report, has some interesting comments to make in this regard:

> If attention to cultural difference results in a more culturally sensitive pedagogy that is without doubt a good thing. But, if in the end it has a negligible or limited effect on outcomes, or if difficulties with acquiring academic skills persist, then I think we have to be honest enough to admit that the strategies of the cultural difference agenda are not sufficient to deliver the standards that we are pursuing.
>
> In real terms, if educators decide through research and then institutionalise through practice a perspective that Islander children learn best in the visual and aural modes, and then adjust teaching strategies accordingly, how is that child ever going to come to grips with and master, English texts? How, that is, can students master English texts if these same texts are continually by-passed in the teaching process?
>
> ...Similarly, if researchers find that Islander children are collaborative learners who do not like to be individually competitive and teachers teach to those characteristics, how is the Islander child going to cope with or access the individually competitive world of higher education and the workplace?[34]

1.51 It is unlikely that such ideas would have been expressed ten years ago when it would have been difficult for Indigenous educators to criticise cultural models of educational disadvantage. The simple fact is that cultural models had had only limited impact on educational systems ten years ago. The current debate on cultural models indicates the progress that has been made in curriculum theory and practice over the past ten years.

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33 Tim Rowse, 'Indigenous Australians' Employment Prospects', *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, No. 40, p. 118

34 Martin Nataka, 'Cutting a Better Deal for Torres Strait Islanders', *Youth Studies*, vol. 14 (4), December 1995, p. 32

Bilingual education and other issues for the Northern Territory Education Department

1.52 The Northern Territory education system is distinctive among Australian education systems in that it has the highest proportion of Indigenous students, as well as the largest number of Indigenous language speakers. The decision of the Northern Territory Education Department early in 1999 to cut out supplementary funding for Indigenous bilingual programs in government schools sparked a heated debate over the role of bilingual programs in Indigenous education in Territory schools. This debate spilled over the border to engage the views of teachers and linguists around the country. The debate was aired in evidence the Committee received at public hearings from Indigenous groups and from university-based linguistic authorities.

1.53 The Committee received a number of submissions which widely criticised this decision of the Northern Territory Government. The process by which the decision was made did not draw those people most involved into the decision-making process. As already mentioned, it was the antithesis of all that we understand about Aboriginal self-determination, a case of policy compromised by bungling processes. The educational merits of the issue are discussed further in Chapter 4.

1.54 The controversies surrounding curriculum, administration and educational funding arrangements in the Northern Territory are likely to continue, following the release in October 1999 of *Learning Lessons*. As expected, the report made trenchant criticism of the administration of Indigenous education in the Territory. It cited falling standards, poor management, and the failure to establish effective working relationships between schools and the community, as factors contributing to a lack of public confidence in the education system.

1.55 The Committee hopes that the report will have the effect of refocussing the attention of the Northern Territory government and its officials on the needs of Indigenous education in the Territory and that it will be read with as much interest outside the Territory because of its relevance to Indigenous education generally.

Summary

1.56 This introductory chapter has dealt with a number of issues that will be referred to in later chapters, as well as one matter, funding, which will not. The issue of the curriculum, of which some broad considerations have been given here, has been seen as highly important, and there are few chapters of the report which do not touch on this subject in some way. Central to this issue is the problem of how to achieve improved levels of literacy. Two other issues of central importance not touched on here are dealt with in later chapters: the problem of ensuring the attendance of children at school and the social and cultural determinants affecting school attendance; and the problem of ensuring a satisfactory supply of well-qualified and well-motivated teachers, especially for those areas where living conditions are difficult.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVOLUTION OF A NATIONAL INDIGENOUS EDUCATION POLICY

> If we were to rewrite the Aboriginal education policy today, we would focus a lot more on the specifics of outcomes. But, given the time in which it was developed, it has been a very major tool for focusing all operations of Aboriginal education - be they at a preschool, primary, secondary, VET or higher education level - around a common set of issues that people needed to at least develop policies on and begin to plan to report against. In that respect, it has been extraordinarily successful. I know there has not been a development like that occurring in any other part of the world in Indigenous education.[1]

2.1 The year 2000 marks the tenth anniversary of implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP). The policy, introduced on 1 January 1990, was a joint initiative of the State and Territory governments and the Commonwealth government. The central goal was 'to achieve broad equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes in all forms of education'.[2] Arguably, the policy has been the single most important initiative undertaken in Indigenous education in the past decade. It represented a broad consensus of views on the critical issues facing Indigenous education, and on the resources and strategies needed to tackle these issues. The broad goals of the policy have guided the activities of governments and educational organisations throughout Australia during this period, and were widely quoted in submissions to the inquiry. The policy remains in place today and continues to influence the educational agenda.

2.2 The policy has had both its critics and supporters during this period. Some educators have seen it as assimilationist while others have questioned the commitment of governments to its aims. Supporters of the policy have commended its aims, the provision of dedicated supplementary funding for Indigenous education, and the involvement of governments in a coordinated national approach. In late 1999 it is clear that equity for Indigenous people in most educational sectors has not yet been achieved and may still be some way off. However, it is also clear that there has been progress in a range of areas, with improvements in many levels of Indigenous educational participation. The record on the national policy, therefore, is mixed, with continued failure in some areas and partial success in others.

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1 Professor Paul Hughes, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 327

2 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement*, Canberra, 1989, p. 9

The role of the Commonwealth in national education policy

2.3 Under the 1967 referendum, the Commonwealth government was given special responsibilities in Indigenous affairs. However, the Commonwealth has a limited role in education. State and territory governments have primary responsibility for most matters relating to schools and vocational education and training. The Commonwealth purchases educational services but does not manage an education system.[3] The Commonwealth provides funding for institutions in the higher education sector but does not manage any institutions.

2.4 The Commonwealth has a role in formulating educational policy at the national level, although much policy implementation necessarily requires the involvement of state and territory governments. The Commonwealth is a member of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which is responsible for coordinating education policy at the national level. The Commonwealth also funds a number of specific educational programs for Indigenous students. These programs are generally supplementary to those administered by the states and territories.

2.5 At the Commonwealth level, policy responsibility for education lies primarily with the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) also provides policy advice to the Minister as requested, and Government agencies, on Indigenous issues, including education. In their submission ATSIC noted that they were currently negotiating a memorandum of understanding with DETYA covering a range of issues, including policy advice. ATSIC does not administer any educational programs.[4] Another of ATSIC's core functions is to monitor the effectiveness of programs for Indigenous people, including those programs conducted by other bodies.[5]

2.6 Indigenous education programs administered by DETYA include financial assistance (Abstudy), tutorial assistance (ATAS), parental involvement (ASSPA), and vocational and educational guidance (VEGAS). The Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP), which is also administered by DETYA, provides supplementary funding to state and territory governments as well as other education providers for Indigenous education initiatives and projects. DETYA also provides some funding for Indigenous education though its mainstream programs in the various educational sectors.[6]

2.7 There are varying opinions on the Commonwealth role in Indigenous education. The notion that the Commonwealth should have no role at all received little support in the inquiry. Commonwealth funded programs were seen by most witnesses

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3 Submission No. 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, vol. 4, p. 48

4 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, pp. 121-123

5 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act, 1989*, Section 7, pp 11-12

6 Submission No. 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, vol. 4, pp. 62-67

as important initiatives (although opinions sometimes differed over whether they could be improved or implemented differently). The provision of supplementary Commonwealth funding was also seen as important, particularly in providing consistency in resourcing for Indigenous education at the national level. There were some concerns that some state and territory governments may have used supplementary funding to substitute for their own funding. There was less support for a more proactive Commonwealth role. Generally, the states and territories were seen as the main providers of educational services, with the Commonwealth in a supplementary role. However, there were some strong criticisms of the record of some state and territory governments in Indigenous education, and a belief in some quarters that the Commonwealth should take a more interventionist role.

The development of the national policy (NATSIEP)

2.8 The national policy (NATSIEP) has been implemented over a period that has seen considerable change and development in Indigenous affairs. The policy itself has not been a static policy. During this time, it has been subject to one major policy review, in 1994, and to refinements through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

2.9 External developments included the Mabo and Wik decisions on native title, the establishment of ATSIC in 1990, moves towards greater self-determination among Indigenous communities, and the reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. These developments have had a profound impact on issues of Indigenous identity and self determination, and on perceptions of Indigenous peoples among the wider community. There have also been developments in the various educational sectors, as well as a number of reports and other initiatives with implications for Indigenous education. These include the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry into the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families.

2.10 The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy was developed as a result of the 1988 Hughes Report. The Policy was a joint initiative of the state, territory and Commonwealth governments. Its development involved consultations with Indigenous community representatives in each state and territory as well as discussions with education authorities and providers. The Policy was introduced in 1990.

2.11 A major review of the policy was undertaken in 1994, at the end of the first triennium of operation. The report of the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples was published in 1995. The findings of the review were examined by a MCEETYA taskforce in 1995, resulting in the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996 – 2002. The intention of the strategy was to confirm and significantly advance the aims of the national policy by the year 2002. In May 1998 the Ministerial Council (MCEETYA) agreed to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education as a permanent item

on the Council's agenda. In 1999 the Council resolved to undertake additional efforts over the next five years to ensure that Indigenous students achieve equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.[7] At the time of the inquiry, it was noted that the Commonwealth is currently developing national strategies on Indigenous school attendance, and literacy and numeracy.

The Hughes Report

2.12 The mid-1980's saw a number of reports and recommendations on Indigenous education, training and employment.[8] In April 1988 the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, the Hon John Dawkins MP, and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon Gerry Hand MP, appointed an Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force. The role of the Task Force was to examine the findings of previous reports into Indigenous education, provide advice on Indigenous education in Australia, and identify priorities in funding for existing programs and new initiatives.

2.13 The Task Force, chaired by the former Chair of the National Aboriginal Education Committee Professor Paul Hughes, concluded its inquiry in July 1988 after a three month period. The report of the Task Force drew largely on existing documents such as policy papers and other government reports. The report highlighted the high level of Indigenous educational disadvantage documented in previous studies. The Task Force made 59 recommendations, the most significant of which was a proposal for a coordinated national Aboriginal education policy.

Findings

2.14 The Task Force found that disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational participation rates were most marked for those in the 16 to 25 year age group. Participation rates for Indigenous pre-school and primary school students, although higher, were still considerably below those of non-Indigenous Australians. The Task Force noted that 13 per cent of compulsory school age Indigenous children were not enrolled at school in 1986 compared to less than two per cent of non-Indigenous children. Indigenous participation rates in higher education were also well below those of other Australians, with the vast majority of Indigenous students studying arts, humanities, social sciences or teacher education.[9]

2.15 The Task Force highlighted the importance of education to the employment prospects of Indigenous people. It found that Indigenous people with tertiary qualifications were employed at comparable rates to their non-Indigenous counterparts

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7 *ibid.*, pp. 49-53

8 These included the reports of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, the House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, and the Miller Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs.

9 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce*, Canberra, 1988, pp. 9-12

with similar qualifications.[10] The report argued that equity in employment outcomes could only be achieved through the elimination of educational inequalities. The report noted that there were strong links between the work of the Task Force and the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy, introduced in 1987.

> [The] employment objectives of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP), ... cannot be achieved without the elimination of inequality in education. Improved educational outcomes are needed to successfully address the range of social disadvantages within the Aboriginal community, such as drug and substance abuse and other health problems, and high levels of welfare dependency.[11]

2.16 The report outlined some of the major barriers to increased Indigenous educational participation documented in previous studies. These included racial discrimination, economic disadvantage, and geographical, social and cultural isolation. A lack of coordination in the provision of services to Indigenous people, particularly between different levels of government, was also highlighted as a significant barrier to increased educational participation.[12]

Recommendations

2.17 To overcome the educational disadvantages experienced by Indigenous Australians, the Task Force proposed the development of a national Aboriginal Education Policy based on five general objectives. These were:

- to achieve equity in the provision of education to all Aboriginal children, young people and adults by the year 2000;
- to assist Aboriginal parents and communities to be fully involved in the planning and provision of education for themselves and their children;
- to achieve parity in participation rates by Aboriginal people with those of other Australians in all stages of education;
- to achieve positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal people in schooling and tertiary education; and
- to improve the provision of education services across the nation at the local level.[13]

2.18 The Task Force recommended re-negotiating existing arrangements between the Commonwealth and the states and territories in order to achieve 'properly resourced long-term strategies to eliminate Aboriginal inequality in education'.[14]

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10 *ibid.*, p. 15

11 *ibid.*, p. 2

12 *ibid.*, p. 16

13 *ibid.*, pp. 16-17

2.19 The involvement of the Aboriginal community in developing policies and programs was seen as central to the development of a national policy. The Task Force stressed that the involvement of Indigenous communities had to be based on the 'principle of self-determination in education'. The Task Force recommended continued support of state and territory Aboriginal education consultative groups, in order to provide an opportunity for local communities to advise governments on aspects of Indigenous education.[15]

2.20 The Task Force noted that Australian education policy was based on the view that a minimum of ten and preferably twelve years of schooling should be provided to all children. It recommended the adoption of strategies that would result in parity in participation rates at all levels of education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by the year 2000.[16]

2.21 Participation rates alone were not considered to be a sufficient measure of improved educational outcomes. The Hughes Report also argued that improving outcomes required changes to the nature and appropriateness of the education provided. This could only be achieved through the establishment of a learning environment that was inclusive of Aboriginal languages, values and culture at all levels. The Task Force advised that any initiatives employed to improve participation rates should take Indigenous cultural values into consideration. One way of achieving this would be by facilitating input into curriculum development from Indigenous communities. The Task Force also argued that the inclusion of Aboriginal studies in the curricula available to non-Indigenous students would increase their understanding of Indigenous culture and make them more sensitive to the needs of Indigenous students.[17]

2.22 Geographical isolation posed a major obstacle to increased educational participation. The Task Force observed that over 11,000 Aboriginal children did not have access to a school program, and identified the expansion of local education programs to rural and remote parts of Australia as an essential goal.[18]

2.23 The Task Force noted that the vocational education and training sector was of particular value to Indigenous people because of the range, diversity and adaptability of programs and courses available. Many Indigenous people, however, were enrolled in non-award or general education courses. While these were valuable in enabling adults to acquire skills missed during their school years, they did not necessarily provide training for employment. The Task Force recommended a number of

14 *ibid.*, p. 2

15 *ibid.*, p. 18

16 *ibid.*, p. 19

17 *ibid.*, pp. 17-20

18 *ibid.*, p. 20

strategies to improve the level and quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in vocational education and training.[19]

2.24 The importance of an Aboriginal presence in the classroom was reflected in recommendations for the Commonwealth Government to promote the training of Aboriginal teachers through the provision of off-campus teacher education courses. Continued Government support for Aboriginal education workers and assistants was also recommended, as was an extension of the National Scheme for Placement of Teachers in Aboriginal Schools.[20] The report also recommended an increase in funding for remote area teacher education in order to overcome the 'tyranny of distance'.[21]

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP)

2.25 A major purpose of the NATSIEP was to 'achieve broad equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes in all forms of education.'[22] The joint policy statement issued in 1989 acknowledged the diversity existing in Indigenous communities, and reaffirmed the main conclusions reached by the Hughes Task Force. The statement drew attention to the need to develop a concerted effort 'by cooperatively directing the strategies of the Commonwealth, the States and Territories, non-government education authorities and educational institutions, to achieve agreed goals'.[23]

2.26 The National Policy focussed on the development of agreed common goals as a means of providing a framework for a national effort. The aim was to encourage flexibility and innovation within diverse educational systems operating under differing philosophies and practices, in order to meet agreed common goals.[24] Importantly, the policy established, as the benchmark for Indigenous Australians, the level of educational access, participation and outcomes achieved by non-Indigenous Australians.

2.27 The policy outlined 21 agreed long term goals.[25] The goals addressed four main educational areas:

- the level of involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making;

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19 *ibid.*, p. 30

20 *ibid.*, pp. 22-29

21 *ibid.*, p. 40

22 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement*, Canberra, 1989, p. 9

23 *ibid.*, p. 11

24 *ibid.*, p. 13

25 The 21 long term goals of the AEP are outlined in detail in Appendix 1.

- equality of access to educational services;
- equity of educational participation; and
- equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

2.28 The policy identified, as an immediate priority, the establishment of 'effective arrangements for the involvement of Aboriginal people in decision-making regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of education services at institutional and system-wide levels'. The strong emphasis on the involvement of Indigenous people in educational decision making came as a response to the concerns raised in the Hughes report over the cultural appropriateness of mainstream education systems and curricula. Early attention was also given to improving educational access and participation for Indigenous children of pre-school and compulsory schooling age.[26]

2.29 The goals of the national policy were incorporated into legislation with the *Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Act 1989*. The Commonwealth undertook to supplement recurrent and capital funding for education with a commitment of funds through the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP).[27] Financial arrangements were agreed to on the understanding that Commonwealth funding commitments would be maintained at the levels negotiated, and that finances allocated by the states and territories would not be diminished because of additional funding from the Commonwealth. The policy also included arrangements for the development of performance indicators to monitor, evaluate and report on the strategies adopted under the policy.

Opinions

2.30 The Committee heard a range of opinions on the NATSIEP. Most submissions to the inquiry were generally supportive of the policy. Much of the evidence saw the policy as a significant initiative, which had had a positive impact on Indigenous education. Literature in support of the policy praised the commitment to increased funding, the element of cooperation between governments, and the support for Indigenous curriculum. The Australian Education Union (AEU) expressed strong support for the national strategy in its submission, commenting that it represented 'the most comprehensive and culturally appropriate consolidation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy to date'.[28]

2.31 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission argued that the policy was important for both symbolic and practical reasons. According to ATSIC, a significant feature of the policy was the consolidation of supplementary funding for Indigenous education into the one Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program

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26 *ibid.*, pp. 15-16

27 *ibid.*, p. 16

28 Submission No. 24, Australian Education Union, vol. 2, p. 129

(IESIP).[29] In most of the states there were strong state-based consultative groups involved in decision making regarding implementation of the policy. Many of the submissions highlighted the ways in which the policy had been used to provide a framework for Indigenous educational provision. Submissions from state Indigenous consultative groups in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia described how the National Policy goals had formed the basis of their educational strategies. In Victoria, the goals had underpinned both the *Partnership in Education: Koorie Education Policy*, introduced in 1990, and the *Koorie 2000 Strategy*, introduced in 1997.[30]

2.32 At a more local level, the Papunya community mentioned the NATSIEP goals in their submission and described the process by which the community had identified ways to progress towards achieving these goals. The national strategy was seen as particularly relevant to the situation at Papunya.[31]

2.33 Some witnesses to the inquiry supported the goals and principles of the NATSIEP but were critical of an apparent lack of progress and a failure on the part of governments to implement key recommendations. These criticisms were also raised in regard to related areas such as health. Some submissions questioned the level of commitment of governments to the goals of the policy. The National Tertiary Education Industry Union commented that there had generally been a poor record of implementation of recommendations in relation to higher education.[32] The submission from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association argued that few attempts had been made in Tasmania to formalise the process for involving Indigenous groups in educational decision making.[33]

2.34 Some submissions were more critical of the policy, describing it as 'assimilationist' and pointing to an emphasis on improvements in mainstream education rather than support for community controlled education initiatives. The 1994 National Review noted a number of similar criticisms, including a perceived lack of support for community controlled education. Criticisms reported in the Review centred on the policy's assimilationist concerns and lack of support for community-controlled initiatives, its depiction of Indigenous people as victims, an apparent failure to adequately reflect the commitment evident in the Hughes report, and vagueness on implementation and evaluation.[34]

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29 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 129

30 Submission No. 20, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, vol. 2, p. 69

31 Submission No. 26, Papunya School, vol. 2, p. 204

32 Submission No. 27, National Tertiary Education Industry Union, vol. 2, p. 216

33 Submission No. 14, Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association, vol. 1, p. 157

34 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, p. 24

2.35 Criticisms of a lack of support for community controlled education initiatives were reflected in some of the evidence provided to the inquiry. Both the Hughes report and the National Policy included recommendations relating to self-determination. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody endorsed this approach. However, according to some witnesses, in emphasising access and equity in mainstream education, and the role of providers in achieving this, the National Policy played down the importance of Indigenous communities and organisations in providing their own education.[35]

2.36 More recently, some literature has criticised the policy for emphasising and simplifying cultural issues in ways that may have limited educational diversity at local levels. These writings have suggested that concerns by policy makers for cultural relevance in education may not necessarily reflect the concerns and aspirations of local communities. The policy is seen as reflecting the concerns of policy makers and interest groups in ways that have not always fitted with the aspirations of local groups, reflecting a tension between local and national priorities.[36]

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

2.37 The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was undertaken during the period in which the national policy was being developed. The final report of the Royal Commission, released in April 1991, drew attention to the link between poor educational outcomes and high rates of imprisonment among Indigenous Australians.

2.38 The Royal Commission endorsed the goals of the national policy and made a number of recommendations in relation to Indigenous education. The Report expressed strong support for the principle of self-determination. 'The only chance for improving education as a social resource for Aboriginal people will come as a result of Aboriginal people deciding for themselves what it is they require of education and then having the means of determining how that end is to be achieved.'.[37] The Report emphasised the important role of pre-school education, the need for Indigenous studies courses, the value of community controlled programs, and the importance of incorporating Indigenous viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters.

2.39 The report of the Royal Commission was quoted in a number of submissions to the inquiry. The Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers was supportive of the Royal Commission recommendations but saw shortcomings in the extent to which they had been implemented under subsequent policy initiatives. Their submission examined the relationship of policy initiatives in the vocational education and adult education sectors to Royal Commission recommendations. They pointed to a

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35 Submission No. 17, Ms Deborah Durnan, vol. 2, p. 32

36 Cathryn McConaghy, 'Containing Diversity: The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy', in Bob Lingard and Paige Porter eds., *A National Approach to Schooling in Australia*, Australian College of Education, Canberra, 1997, p. 127

37 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, National Report, vol.4, 1991, p.301

failure by governments 'to demonstrate any real commitment to the right of Aboriginal people to choose their own alternatives to the dominant or mainstream education system'.[38] These views were endorsed by the submission from the Institute for Aboriginal Development, particularly in relation to Indigenous control of educational organisations. The report of the inquiry into implementation of RCIADIC recommendations, *Justice Under Scrutiny*, was also mentioned in the submission from the Australian Education Union.

2.40 The submission from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission commented that the Royal Commission put pressure on governments and educators to move more rapidly on Indigenous education. The Royal Commission endorsed the national policy framework for consultation and involvement of Indigenous peoples in education, and drew attention to the importance of cultural differences and their effect on learning processes. The ATSIC submission drew attention to the fact that all governments supported the Royal Commission recommendations, with the Commonwealth committing additional funding for Indigenous education workers and pre-school places. ATSIC considered that there had been some positive changes since the Royal Commission, with an increasing number of schools providing a culturally responsive education.[39]

2.41 The Commissions' recommendations were wide ranging and covered areas that are examined in greater detail elsewhere in this report. Recommendations in relation to Indigenous people in custody, in particular, are examined in more detail in chapter three. In general, while there have been encouraging developments in areas such as the introduction of Indigenous studies subjects in schools, there still remains much to be done. The area of support for community controlled education, in particular, remains an area where governments have generally failed to adequately reflect the intent of the Royal Commission recommendations.

The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

> ...education should be constructed in ways that value and respect diversity rather than standardisation.[40]

2.42 In January 1993 the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Robert Tickner MP, announced that a National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples would be conducted. The principal aim would be to review the operation and effectiveness of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy at the end of its first triennium. A Reference Group chaired

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38 Submission No. 15, Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers, vol. 1, p. 202

39 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 133

40 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, p. 21

by Mr Mandawuy Yunupingu was appointed to conduct the review. The review was given the following terms of reference:

> Against the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP), examine the effectiveness of the strategies developed through the first triennium of the Policy, the outcomes achieved and the extent of unmet need; and develop subsequent strategies in terms of:
>
> - ensuring Aboriginal involvement in educational decision making;
> - providing equality of access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to education services;
> - raising the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in education to those for all Australians;
> - achieving equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people while acknowledging traditional and contemporary cultural differences, including gender issues;
> - ensuring appropriate reporting, monitoring and evaluation procedures for the use of funds provided in support of the AEP, and
> - examining allocations, distribution and management of resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and compatibility of these resource allocations with needs.[41]

2.43 The Review was conducted during 1993 and 1994. An extensive process of public consultations was undertaken, along with an examination of written submissions and analysis of statistical data. The final report was presented in 1995, and contained a total of 44 recommendations.

2.44 The Review found widespread support for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. The Review observed that access to education had improved for Indigenous people since the introduction of the Policy, despite technical problems with some programs. However, Indigenous Australians still lagged behind other Australians in terms of equitable cultural, economic and social outcomes from education.[42]

2.45 Issues of equity and the link between education and reconciliation were central themes of the report. The Review argued that self-determination in education would be a significant step towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

> For Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, self-determination in education is essential; it creates the framework which allows Indigenous

41 *ibid.*, p. 1

42 *ibid.*, p. 14

> Australians to be themselves and puts them on an equal footing with other national and international communities.[43]

2.46 The Review noted a number of criticisms of the NATSIEP for focussing on improving Indigenous participation and involvement in 'mainstream' education rather than providing a framework for self-determination and community controlled education. Some submissions described the policy as 'assimilationist'. However, the Review recommended that governments reaffirm their commitment to the NATSIEP. The Review concluded that the policy was serving a 'vital purpose' by:

> ...helping to build an Australian culture in which there is greater recognition and respect for Aboriginality, together with a greater awareness and sensitivity to the aspirations and concerns of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders.[44]

2.47 The Review outlined five principles underpinning its conclusions and recommendations, and suggested that these principles should be reflected in decisions made by organisations developing education policies or providing educational services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The principles were:

- enabling Indigenous people to exercise self-determination in education;
- providing Indigenous people with the power to make choices in education;
- shifting the administrative responsibility for decisions on Indigenous education closer to the communities;
- ensuring coordination of services between Indigenous communities and higher levels of administration; and
- maximising resource allocation to the provision of education services for Indigenous people.[45]

2.48 The National Review was concerned at the limited power of regional and local Indigenous communities, whose role was often purely advisory. Greater direct control over funding and a strengthened decision-making role for Indigenous people was required to achieve self-determination in education. It was also important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were able to determine their educational needs and delivery options, thus exercising real choices in education, rather than choosing from options constructed for them.[46]

2.49 The National Review concluded that different ways of involving Indigenous people in educational decision-making processes were needed to create a foundation

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43 *ibid.*, p. 23

44 *ibid.*, p. 24

45 *ibid.*, p. 27

46 *ibid.*, p. 32

from which they could exercise greater control over their education. The Review recommended that organisations with responsibility for developing educational policy or providing educational services for Indigenous students should appoint an Indigenous person or advisory body to ensure that Indigenous views were reflected in their decisions.[47]

2.50 The National Review also recommended the formation of a new independent national body, which would be a signatory to the NATSIEP, to oversee education for Indigenous Australians. The Review recommended that the Commonwealth convene a national conference to determine the terms of reference, membership, roles and responsibilities of this body and its relationship with other groups.[48] To the best of the Committees' knowledge this does not appear to have happened, although the Committee acknowledges the coordinating role being undertaken by MCEETYA.

2.51 The National Review noted concerns that there was insufficient contact between Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs) and local communities, and recommended that AECGs be restructured to ensure that office-holders were elected by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. Structures should also be put in place to ensure access for local communities to AECG representatives. The Review recommended that AECGs should be established as incorporated advisory bodies, and should be paid directly by grants-in-aid to bring funding in line with other similar bodies.[49]

2.52 The National Review recommended that programs aimed at encouraging Indigenous students to enrol in higher education be expanded to further increase participation and retention rates. State and territory governments should also provide incentives to ensure the retention of tertiary educated Indigenous Australians in the education sector, and provide employment conditions which recognised family, social and cultural responsibilities. Evidence presented to the Review indicated that progress in increasing Indigenous employment in education had been 'patchy'. While increases in ancillary and support staff had occurred, the number of Indigenous teaching staff was still small.[50]

2.53 The Review found 'almost universal praise for the important and positive benefits' provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers (AIEWs).[51] The AIEWs provided 'positive role models' for all students. The Report recommended a review of pay and working arrangements through the establishment of awards for AIEWs to better reflect their role in assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait

47 *ibid.*, p. 36

48 *ibid.*, p. 37

49 *ibid.*, pp. 40-41

50 *ibid.*, pp. 41-45

51 Also known as Aboriginal Teacher Aides, Assistant Teachers, Koorie Educators, Community Teachers, Aboriginal Literacy Workers, and Home School Liaison Officers.

Islander people to participate in education. The Review saw this as one way of combating high turnover rates among AIEWs.[52]

2.54 The National Review made a total of 44 recommendations. These covered the following main areas:

- increasing involvement and self-determination in all aspects of education;
- improving access to and exchange of information on best practice in Indigenous education;
- changing Indigenous educator employment conditions;
- ensuring equitable access to and higher participation in all levels of education;
- achieving equitable and relevant outcomes;
- support for monitoring and evaluation projects, and
- improving funding for existing AESIP programs.[53]

2.55 The National Review also published a comprehensive statistical annexe documenting levels of Indigenous educational participation and outcomes. While some submissions commented that statistical data show only a limited picture of Indigenous education, the statistics collected in the annexe have provided a useful means of measuring progress towards the NATSIEP goals.

Opinions

2.56 Some writers have challenged the assumptions and principles on which the National Review was based. Both Martin Nakata and Cathryn McConaghy, for example, point to evidence of 'culturalism', or a view that Indigenous educational problems are primarily problems of 'culture' to be solved by implementing a more culturally relevant education. This approach was seen as underpinning 'both ways' education and the National Policy, and was described as problematic for a number of reasons. It was said to leave unchallenged the major structural, material and moral bases of injustice from which the Indigenous population suffered. It took no account of contemporary 'hybrid' realities, which reflect a range of cultural influences. It also engaged in a politics of 'tribalism', in which Indigenous values were pitted against non-Indigenous values.[54]

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52 *ibid.*, pp. 50-52

53 *ibid.*, pp. 129-130

54 Cathryn McConaghy, 'Containing Diversity: The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy', in Bob Lingard and Paige Porter eds., *A National Approach to Schooling in Australia*, Australian College of Education, Canberra, 1997, p. 231

2.57 Some writers have argued that one of the flaws of the Review was its failure to value diversity by favouring a cultural model for Indigenous educational disadvantage. McConaghy argues that the National Review did not favour a model of mainstream education for Indigenous Australians, yet many Indigenous parents argue for a mainstream education. According to McConaghy, the 1994 review failed to address some of the problems identified by critics of the national policy, and in large part reproduced them.[55] Writers such as Nakata and McConaghy have argued that both mainstream and non-mainstream approaches should be accommodated in a national Indigenous education policy, reflecting the diversity of views and opinions within the community.

The National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

2.58 In 1995 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), in response to the National Review, developed the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996 – 2002. The National Strategy reaffirmed the commitment of MCEETYA to the National Policy and established a number of priority areas. The recommendations of the National Review were cross-referenced to the 21 NATSIEP goals. The 21 goals were also aggregated into seven priority areas, with an additional eighth priority covering reforms to implementation, evaluation and resourcing arrangements.

2.59 The eight priorities of the MCEETYA National Strategy were:

1. to establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in educational decision-making;
2. to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples employed in education and training;
3. to ensure equitable access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to education and training services;
4. to ensure participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in education and training;
5. to ensure equitable and appropriate educational attainment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
6. to promote, maintain and support the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, cultures and languages to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students;
7. to provide community development training services including proficiency in English literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults; and

55 *ibid.*, pp. 126-132

8. to improve NATSIEP implementation, evaluation and resourcing arrangements.[56]

2.60 A range of agreed outcomes were specified for each priority, covering the areas of early childhood education, schooling, vocational education and training, and higher education. Strategies for implementation and performance monitoring were also outlined.

Opinions

2.61 As with the NATSIEP, the MCEETYA National Strategy has been used to provide a valuable framework for Indigenous educational provision in the states and territories.. In South Australian the eight priorities of the MCEETYA national strategy form the basis of the operations and future plans of the South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee (SAAETAC).[57] Educational programs being implemented in South Australia, such as *Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum*, are consistent with the National Strategy.[58] SAAETAC recommended a continued commitment to the Strategy on the part of all governments and education providers.

2.62 While it supported the National Strategy, SAAETAC commented that some providers had experienced difficulties in implementing the MCEETYA priorities.[59] In particular, there had been a level of uneasiness about the establishment of targets and performance indicators against the priorities providers felt they were able to achieve against. There was a concern that qualitative indicators should receive more recognition in assessing progress towards the MCEETYA priorities.

2.63 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission supported the commitment made by MCEETYA to the NATSIEP goals and the shift towards an outcomes focus. They saw a need, however, for further research and data collection, and commented that it had not been possible to offer views on the first triennium of the NATSIEP due to a lack of data.[60]

2.64 Some submissions argued that the MCEETYA National Strategy again failed to acknowledge the role of independent aboriginal community organisations and education providers. The Strategy was primarily aimed at state and territory public education systems as the main providers. This represented a retreat from the recommendations of inquiries such as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. One submission pointed to a tension between the goals of consultation

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56 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996 – 2002*, DEETYA, Canberra, 1996, p. 1

57 Mr Frank Lampard, *Hansard*, Port Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 136

58 Submission No. 31, South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee, vol. 4, p. 10

59 Mr Frank Lampard, *Hansard*, Port Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 136

60 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, pp. 133-137

and involvement on the one hand, and ownership and control on the other. [61] In the vocational education and training sector, concerns were expressed that the National Strategy would direct scarce public funds specifically allocated for Aboriginal education into integrating Indigenous people into mainstream vocational strategies rather than supporting Indigenous community development strategies.

Further Developments

2.65 In 1998 the Ministerial Council (MCEETYA) agreed to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education as a permanent item on the Council's agenda. In April 1999 the Commonwealth provided an overview of progress in Indigenous education to the Council, and pointed out that the absence of nationally aggregated data limited the Council's capacity to report on progress. The Council made a commitment to additional efforts in Indigenous education over the next five years, including the development of more consistent performance indicators and targets. The Council also agreed to establish a working group on Indigenous education chaired by the Commonwealth.[62]

2.66 The Commonwealth is currently developing national strategies on Indigenous school attendance, and Indigenous literacy and numeracy. The Commonwealth has also adopted an increased focus on outcomes reporting. Education providers in receipt of IESIP funding are now required to set performance indicators for the measurement of progress in each of the eight MCEETYA priority areas.[63]

Conclusion

2.67 Indigenous education policy at the national level has gone through an evolutionary process over the last ten years. While there have been a number of changes, the continuities have been more apparent than the differences and no doubt reflect the level of consensus established in the original joint policy statement. The changes that have been made for the purpose of making the policy more workable and accountable. The NATSIEP has proved highly durable, surviving changes of government at all levels and the broader social and economic transformations that have taken place over the last ten years. There has in fact been a remarkable degree of consensus among political parties and governments concerning the aims of the NATSIEP. The fact that the policy was enshrined in legislation no doubt accounts for some of its durability.

2.68 The NATSIEP goals are couched in terms that are hard to argue against. The achievement of educational equity is a laudable policy aim, and has been supported by all governments and political parties. The national policy provided a coordinated approach between governments backed up by dedicated supplementary funding. These

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61 Submission No. 17, Ms Deborah Durnan, vol. 2, pp. 32-35

62 Submission No. 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, vol. 4, pp. 49-53

63 *ibid.*, p. 63

have been major improvements, and were supported by many witnesses in the current inquiry. The process of implementation has been a lengthy one, however, as one witness to the inquiry made clear, with formal agreement between the Commonwealth and the states and territories only being finalised in 1995.[64] The lack of apparent progress in some areas may reflect these processes.

2.69 At the Commonwealth level, the most obvious manifestation of the policy has been a number of national programs aimed at increasing the levels of Indigenous involvement in education and the levels of support provided to Indigenous students. These programs have provided consistent, supplementary levels of assistance across the various education systems. They were widely supported in many submissions to the inquiry. The centrally funded direct assistance programs of ATAS, ASSPA and VEGAS were seen as particularly important. At the same time, there were some concerns about the level of flexibility in some of the funding models used by DETYA. Some witnesses were concerned that there should be more certainty of funding and that it should be possible to provide funding directly to schools and regional projects.

Recommendation 3

2.70 The Committee recommends that the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) programs should be retained as centrally funded programs administered by DETYA.

Recommendation 4

2.71 The Committee recommends that DETYA investigate ways of providing greater flexibility in the use of discretionary funds, including funding for regional projects and direct funding for schools.

2.72 Since the National Policy was first implemented there have been both improvements in Indigenous educational participation and outcomes, and areas where progress has been less than satisfactory. The National Policy has undoubtedly contributed towards some of the improvements. However, the policy has also been subject to scrutiny during this period, and has been affected by continuing debate over some of the central issues in Indigenous education. The policy has been criticised both for being 'assimilationist' and for emphasising a cultural model of Indigenous educational disadvantage. The Committee sees some truth in both arguments.

2.73 Education policy is often based on a human capital model, where education is seen as an investment from which both the individual and the community benefit. 'According to this model, increased education pays off in increased employment outcomes.'[65] The report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force in 1988 followed the implementation of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy and

64 Professor Paul Hughes, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 333

65 R G Schwab, *Post-compulsory education and training for Indigenous Australians*, CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 131, Canberra, 1997, p. 7

drew strong links between education and employment. Education was seen as a significant factor in the elimination of income inequality. Indigenous people were notably disadvantaged when compared to other Australians on mainstream indicators of educational participation and outcomes, and this was a contributing factor to lower employment and higher levels of income inequality.

2.74 In its inception, the national policy was concerned with correcting mainstream indicators of educational disadvantage and using educational advancement to promote economic equity (a 'human capital' model of education). In this respect, the policy has been very much centred on the mainstream rather than on alternative forms of education, and on making whatever changes were necessary to the mainstream in order to improve participation and attainment. Some research has suggested that 'human capital' models of education may be problematic for Indigenous Australians. Nevertheless, education continues to be seen as an important element in improving the social and economic conditions of Indigenous Australians by both policy makers and many Indigenous Australians themselves. The Committee believes that there is a need to explore alternatives to mainstream education, particularly in the area of adult education.

2.75 In concentrating on the mainstream, however, the NATSIEP put a strong emphasis on changing the mainstream to better accommodate the needs of Indigenous people. Changes included the advocacy of culturally inclusive curricula, the teaching of Indigenous languages, the employment of Indigenous teachers, and the introduction of Indigenous studies subjects in schools. Many witnesses in the inquiry welcomed these changes and pointed to positive effects on educational participation and outcomes. However, some witnesses considered they could go further while others thought they may have gone too far. The main concern of the latter group was that the emphasis on cultural issues may have shifted the focus away from the need for access to mainstream education of the same standard as that available to non-Indigenous Australians. The curriculum chapter in this report examines these issues in greater detail.

2.76 Indigenous educational policy has been largely driven by statistical comparisons. Although some submissions questioned the relevance of quantitative indicators, they will continue to drive policy in this area. The National Policy established the participation and achievement rates of the non-Indigenous population as the benchmark for Indigenous people. Many Indigenous people agree with this approach. Interest in statistical comparisons has, if anything, increased in recent years. Through MCEETYA, the Commonwealth has been involved in implementing standardised benchmarking and reporting procedures for Indigenous education, with support from state and territory governments as well as central agencies such as ATSIC. However, some organisations have questioned the performance indicators used in funding agreements with the Commonwealth, calling for the submission of qualitative as well as quantitative data for performance reports. Some organisations

have also called for more transparency in funding arrangements and outcomes measures.[66]

2.77 To the extent that progress continues to be measured in mainstream statistical terms, the National Policy could be regarded as 'assimilationist'. Yet, as the Committee heard when visiting Indigenous communities around Australia, mainstream educational success is seen as desirable by many Indigenous communities and not necessarily incompatible with Indigenous values. These concerns are driven by evidence showing that lack of mainstream educational success has serious social and economic consequences for Indigenous communities, and is a significant factor in entrenched poverty, poor health, and high rates of imprisonment. At the community level the debate is often about the means of achieving outcomes rather than the outcomes or ends themselves.

2.78 The National Policy put a strong emphasis on improving the cultural relevance of education through facilitating Indigenous involvement in educational decision making. The policy rationale was that greater Indigenous involvement would improve the relevance of education and therefore participation. Both the National Policy and the 1994 National Review drew the conclusion that mainstream approaches had not worked for large sections of the Indigenous population and that alternative approaches needed to be supported. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody also put a strong emphasis on cultural values and self-determination in education.

2.79 Some recent literature has been critical of this emphasis, suggesting that the adoption of a cultural model of Indigenous educational disadvantage may have limited the ability of policy makers to respond to diversity within Indigenous communities. In some instances a focus on cultural issues may have been at the expense of mainstream educational outcomes. Some communities visited in the inquiry were concerned at mainstream indicators such as English language proficiency and numeracy. Some of the literature argues that both mainstream and non-mainstream approaches should be accommodated in a national Indigenous education policy. This would better reflect the diversity of views and opinions within the Indigenous community. In the Committee's view, there seems little reason to suggest that a national Indigenous education policy cannot recognise and encourage diversity, including a diversity of educational approaches.

2.80 Some writers have also pointed to differing policy processes in Indigenous education in recent years.[67] Over the period in which the national policy has been implemented, post-secondary education has also gone through significant changes. Particular examples include the Training Reform Agenda in the vocational education and training sector. These writers have pointed to a lack of fit between these separate but related areas and that of national Indigenous education policy.

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66 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, pp. 137-138

67 Submission No. 17, Ms Deborah Durnan, vol. 2, pp. 29-30

2.81 With these caveats in mind, the Committee believes that the National Policy has provided a flexible and appropriate framework to initiate and administer innovative programs designed to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians. For the most part it has proved a successful strategy. However, the gap between educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians remains wide. The statistical record on Indigenous education ten years after implementation of the national policy is a mixed one. It would be fair to say that there have been significant increases in participation in almost all areas of Indigenous education over the past ten years, but that improvements in outcomes have been less spectacular. A closer scrutiny of participation data also show that in most sectors Indigenous people continue to participate at lower levels than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The fact that high levels of disadvantage still exist should not detract, however, from the very real advances that have been made. The Committee believes it is essential to increase efforts to build upon what has already been achieved, rather than becoming discouraged at apparently slow progress.

2.82 A number of submissions have called for regular national reviews of Indigenous education similar to the 1994 Review. The submission from ATSIC calls for triennial evaluations of the NATSIEP. The Committee notes that the National Review was conducted at the end of the first triennium of the NATSIEP and that the policy will soon be entering its fourth triennium of operation.

Recommendation 5

2.83 The Committee recommends that a comprehensive review of the NATSIEP be undertaken in 2002, at the end of the fourth triennium of operation.

Recommendation 6

2.84 The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth, state and territory policies and strategies be developed and delivered in a context that recognises, and takes full account of, the cultural history, identity, diversity and continuing educational disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Recommendation 7

2.85 The Committee recommends the appointment of an independent national consultative body to advise MCEETYA on indigenous education needs and policy; this body to include representatives of ATSIC and the Indigenous education consultative bodies that already advise state and territory education ministers.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

> The inescapable conclusion is that family and social variables dominate the decision to stay on at school. The effect of the geography variable, representing proximity to educational institutions, is in general dwarfed by the influence of the local social and family environment.[1]

The social context

3.1 A number of witnesses in the inquiry raised issues relating to Indigenous lifestyles and their interaction with education systems. These often focused on cultural inclusivity and the organisation of educational institutions. The evidence tended to centre, on the one hand, on the need for Indigenous people to adopt values and behaviours that would allow them to succeed in mainstream education and, on the other, on the need for education systems to find better ways of adapting to Indigenous lifestyles.

3.2 For Indigenous communities, altered socio-economic circumstances have affected schooling, the culture of childhood and adolescence, and have influenced the development of acceptable pedagogy. Some of these socio-economic circumstances have also altered the perceptions and attitudes of non-Indigenous decision makers and leaders. Generational change and social dislocation have also influenced educational outcomes. Running parallel to these changes have been political developments resulting in a reappraisal of the rights, responsibilities, and roles of Commonwealth, state and territory governments, as well as Indigenous bodies and communities themselves.

3.3 Socio-economic and cultural changes have brought both opportunities and problems to Indigenous communities. Indigenous people now experience a different level of complexity in their own lives and in their communities, which was not anticipated twenty years ago. These changes impact on education, presenting challenges to educators, parents, and students alike. *Learning Lessons* documents these changes as they affect the Northern Territory, but the Committee notes that the issues raised in that report were evident in site visits in other parts of the country.

> There is now a far higher level of income available that has provided benefits, but also a growing level of welfare dependency that is sapping the strength and morale of Indigenous communities. Students are more mobile than ever before with consequent disruption to their education. Substance

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1 B Hunter and R G Schwab, *The determinants of indigenous educational outcomes*, Discussion Paper No. 160/1998, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, p. vi

> abuse and violence with the resultant family and community disorder are now far greater problems than they were twenty years ago.[2]

3.4 Health issues for children, and the implications for schooling, are explored in Chapter 8. However, in the broader community context preventable 'lifestyle diseases' are major contributors to early morbidity in adults. Early pregnancy and parental responsibilities contribute to young women leaving school. Even more telling is what is described as the 'communications explosion' experienced in remote communities.

> The unchecked use of this form of entertainment [television and videos] was widely cited across the Territory by students, teachers, parents and home liaison officers as a significant cause of the sleep deprivation that impacts so negatively on school-age students and on their educational outcomes. Because the authority of parents over their children has continued to erode – a factor not confined to Indigenous families – the need for programs to be officered at the school to be relevant, interesting, enjoyable and challenging for students is greater now than it ever was.[3]

3.5 It is also worth noting at this point that the observation is often made that the relationship between children, even young children, and their parents is significantly different in Indigenous families and communities compared to most European families. Indigenous children, and particularly boys, enjoy a large measure of autonomy from a young age. Parental control is more limited and sanctions are seldom used. Children do not enjoy protection because of their immaturity, and learn from an early age to fend for themselves. This has serious implications for their acceptance of the discipline of learning and adapting to rules where the culture of the school reflects the dominant culture.

3.6 These cultural differences are not confined to remote areas. The Committee heard evidence of these aspects of culture on its visit to Cooktown High School. Because communities were relatively safe, children from a very young age make decisions as to when they will go out and where, when they will come home and what they will do in their communities. They tend to grow up quickly. Some of the boys have been independent from the age of ten, which made it difficult for them to conform to the ordered routine of school life. Schools were also restricted in the extent to which they could be flexible in dealing with these independent spirits.[4] Research by Malin demonstrates the effect different child-rearing practices can have on behaviour in schools, and teacher perceptions.[5]

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2 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons, An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, p. 28

3 *ibid.*

4 Precis of Evidence, Cooktown, 2 August 1999, p.7

5 Stephen Harris and Merridy Malin, *Aboriginal Kids in Urban Classrooms*, Social Science Press, Wentworth Falls, NSW, 1994, p. 78

The importance of kinship

3.7 Early in its visits to Indigenous communities the Committee became quickly aware of the central importance of kinship among Indigenous people. Kinship has been described as the basic organising principle of Indigenous society; more important to a person's life than 'getting on' and relying on ones own resources. It is not therefore surprising that education, as a process and a means of 'getting on' is accorded less value – often very much less value – than association with being a member of a particular family or social group.[6] The report of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) into literacy among children in remote Aboriginal communities in Central Australia observed that teenage attachments were to close relatives and to families with whom their parents and grandparents associated. These attachments were very important to the sense of identification of children and adolescents. 'Even major sporting offers may be turned down as less desirable than involvement with community members.'[7]

3.8 The importance of kinship and its effect on educational outcomes is recognised in the submission from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, which listed among factors contributing to poor educational outcomes among Indigenous children an unwillingness on their part to leave home. This affected secondary school and university attendance in particular. Students living in remote communities were deterred from attending schools and other institutions in the larger centres and capital cities by the lack of financial and emotional support.[8] Given the scope for financial assistance under Abstudy, the Committee considers that community and emotional pressures are likely to be more significant than financial constraints.

Boys missing out

3.9 Informed observation and research point to differences in educational outcomes for boys and girls. The differences are particularly evident in the secondary years of schooling, but the trend begins early. It has been observed from pre-school through to post-secondary schooling that girls outstrip boys all the way. The stronger motivation among girls to continue their schooling may be attributed to their realisation that education provides a way to independence through a job. Girls are the workers of the family, helping to hold it together, whereas boys have fewer responsibilities in their childhood and adolescent years.

3.10 One commentator suggested that the traditional learning style of girls allowed them to adapt more readily to school learning. Girls are also thought to have more ability to relate their schooling and their English language skills to employment

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6 National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, *Desert Schools*, SA Teaching and Curriculum Centre, University of Adelaide and University of South Australia, Adelaide, 1996, vol. 2, p.77

7 *ibid.*

8 Submission No. 34, ATSIC, vol. 5, p.141

opportunities in their communities.[9] There are far more women teachers and teacher assistants filling these roles than there are men. As one comment to the National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia inquiry from teachers in Western Australia noted:

> The women have the jobs eyed off – you ask the girls what they want to do – they want to be clinic sisters, AEWs (Aboriginal Education Workers) and store workers and there is nowhere for a man to go. Well, they're certainly not interested in the sort of work that's presented here – there's only a few that work here and they are from another place anyway. The oldest boy we have at the school is 12 years old. And he only goes if there is nothing else better to do, and he's the one who really had potential and he decided that it's just not the place for him.[10]

3.11 It is the common observation that boys drop out of school because of social pressure. They view school as an experience that belongs to childhood, and therefore to be dispensed with in early adolescence. Even bright and promising boys become indifferent to school about the time of their initiation. In Kalgoorlie, the Committee was told that young boys in traditional communities can only be taught by an elder after initiation.[11]

Attitudes to education

3.12 Neglect of Indigenous education by governments finds its covert rationale, however indefensible this may be, in perceptions of Indigenous indifference to the benefits of education. These perceptions are not reflected in the activities of Indigenous organisations. The leadership groups in national bodies such as ATSIC and the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers have been vigorous advocates of Indigenous education, and there is strong evidence that parents across the country have become alarmed at the lack of progress that their children appear to be making. In some cases they may have enjoyed a better education than their children.

3.13 Nonetheless, there is an attitude among some educators and community leaders that little progress will be made until solutions are found to wider community problems that affect education. To combat the range of social problems that impede educational development, an holistic, community development approach involving those who are closest to the problems is imperative. At the school level, this means involving Indigenous parents in their children's schooling, achievements, and difficulties, as well as assisting them to understand that school attendance alone will not result in better outcomes. The Committee heard strong confirmation of the latter point at its Alice Springs hearing. The Principal of Yirara College explained:

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9 National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, *Desert Schools*, SA Teaching and Curriculum Centre, University of Adelaide and University of South Australia, Adelaide, 1996, vol. 2, p.79

10 *ibid.*, p. 80

11 Kalgoorlie Site Visit, 14 September 1999

> The world view is that education is something that other people do for Indigenous people. It is provided to be there when they want to make use of it and they do not see it as a commitment. For Aboriginal students the hard slog of day in, day out doing something in the classroom, not just sitting there and absorbing as they would in a traditional culture, is also a problem. Many parents see if students come to school and sit in those classrooms they will learn, but it is hard to get through to students and parents that the students actually have to do the work and have to do it on a regular basis to get the outcomes that the government and others are looking for.[12]

3.14 The Committee believes it is the responsibility of schools to inform parents and students about how schools operate and learning occurs, where this is required. It is a fundamental right that parents receive feedback from schools on all aspects of a child's education and progress. As a first and vital step to facilitating a community development approach to problem solving, the role of the school staff is critical. *Learning Lessons* identifies good practice in this regard at the Barunga Community Education Centre, where Indigenous and non Indigenous staff visit parents one afternoon a week and develop a partnership approach to student progress. This partnership approach extends to the community council's involvement in monitoring student attendance.[13]

School attendance

3.15 The perception that Indigenous cultures and lifestyles were a contributing factor to low educational outcomes was reflected in the submission from Yirara College in the Northern Territory.

> The main underlying reason for many of the 'failures' in the field of Indigenous development is simply that the Indigenous people have a different cultural agenda from that of mainstream Australia.[14]

3.16 This comment was most frequently made in relation to levels of attendance. Some of the reasons for the extremely low levels of attendance in the Northern Territory were said to be cultural factors, including the relationship between Aboriginal parents and their children, and the impact of transient lifestyles.

> Aboriginal parents cannot force their young people to do much of anything because, as good parents, they do not want to make their children sad or unhappy. ... The world view is that education is something that other people do for Indigenous people. It is provided to be there when they want to make use of it and they do not see it as a commitment.[15]

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12 Mrs Fay Genuth, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p.252

13 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons, an independent review of indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, p. 45

14 Submission No. 9, Yirara College, vol. 1, p. 79

15 Mrs Fay Genuth, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 252

3.17 There is no argument about the contribution of absenteeism to the failure of schools to make headway in achieving improved educational outcomes among Indigenous children. As the submission from the Northern Territory Department of Education notes:

> The single most pressing obstacle to any achievement of compulsory school-age Indigenous students in education is attendance at school. There are a multiplicity of factors for overall low participation rates in schooling. The relationship between low, sporadic or irregular attendance, including a high mobility between schools and outcomes from schooling is very real.[16]

3.18 The submission from the Northern Territory states that attendance rates for students from non-urban (predominantly Indigenous) schools are consistently 13 to 16 per cent lower than those of urban (predominantly non-Indigenous) schools. Despite attention given to this problem at both school and system level attendance rates have declined over the past twenty years.[17]

3.19 A number of communities are taking positive steps to raise attendance levels. Communities in Central Australia are reported to use a number of strategies for improving attendance. These include certificates and prizes for good attendance, food supplements, the right to go on excursions, and admission tickets to community facilities like roller-skating rinks.[18] The Committee heard that in other communities elders were often employed for the purpose of rounding up children from their homes in the morning. Sometimes a number of teachers were regularly engaged in this routine. In many cases the cause of absenteeism was simply lack of sleep: usually the result of watching late night television or video programs. There were also links to poor diet.

3.20 Another factor contributing to absenteeism is the increased mobility of Indigenous kinship groups. Attendance at initiation ceremonies, football carnivals and funerals are often given as a reason for children being absent from school.[19] The Committee heard evidence of the extent of the problem at its hearings in Brewarrina. The principal at the central school reported that in 1998 there were 116 enrolments during the year and 57 departures. Families go back and forward between Brewarrina and Goodooga, and others head south to Dubbo, Bathurst and Mildura. It is very difficult to track students unless the schools to which they re-enrol contact Brewarrina Central for the student records. If families head for Sydney it is unlikely that their children will attend school because they are often too frightened to use public

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16 Submission No.33, Northern Territory Department of Education, vol. 5, p. 9

17 *ibid.*

18 National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, *Desert Schools*, SA Teaching and Curriculum Centre, University of Adelaide and University of South Australia, Adelaide, 1996, vol. 2, p. 290

19 National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, *Desert Schools*, SA Teaching and Curriculum Centre, University of Adelaide and University of South Australia, Adelaide, 1996, vol. 2, p. 74

transport. Eventually they come back to Brewarrina, but by then they may have gaps in their education extending up to 12 months and beyond.[20]

3.21 New South Wales schools in the western region have activated an Aboriginal mobility project to track students in and out of the public schools. Computers and facsimile machines make this easier, although it falls down with cross-border movements and sometimes with enrolments in non-government schools. Nor, for reasons which the Committee was not told, did it work with movement to Sydney, possibly because parents do not attempt to enrol their children in metropolitan schools.

3.22 Almost all locations experienced problems related to high levels of mobility in the Indigenous population. The issue of transience was linked to issues of attendance and truancy, and was as much an issue of teaching practice and organisation as curriculum. At Geraldton, it was emphasised that education systems needed to adapt more to transient lifestyles, and that this was an area few education systems had dealt with successfully to date. Some practical examples of the use of technology to deliver education to transient peoples were found in Geraldton, the Goldfields region and north-western NSW. These involved the use of tracking systems to provide information to schools on Indigenous students. (These systems are described in more detail in the section on technology.)

3.23 In discussions with staff at Jessica Point School in the Napranum Community in Far North Queensland, the Committee was told that absenteeism is mainly a problem in the wet season when some of the roads are closed. There is also a problem in the 'dry', however, because the roads are open, allowing communities to move about. Suggestions to the Queensland Education department that the school year be organised in such a way as to suit the seasons, have not been received enthusiastically. It appears that large-scale bureaucracies cannot easily cope with regional variations and that there are problems with negotiating changes with the various unions covering staff.[21]

3.24 Some witnesses pointed to the need for Indigenous people to take control of educational issues such as attendance and truancy. Some witnesses also suggested that it might be necessary to take punitive action such as withholding welfare payments in order to improve levels of attendance.

> I go back to my point: unless the Aboriginal communities come on board and do stuff for themselves, nothing will ever change.[22]

3.25 Staff at Jessica Point told the Committee that community elders were taking the problem of absenteeism seriously and had formed a justice group to consider

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20 *Hansard*, Brewarrina, 26 July 1999, p. 12

21 Precis of Evidence, Weipa, 3 August 1999, p. 1

22 Mary Blaiklock, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 262

appropriate sanctions to enforce school attendance. Discussion was currently underway on community-levied fines of the order provided for under Queensland departmental regulations. Kowanyama community was reported to have applied these penalties successfully for a number of years, with fines of $350 for a first offence. In the first year of its operation there was a 100 per cent improvement in attendance. Numbers fell in the second year when the fines were not enforced. It was enforced in third and subsequent year with good results.[23]

3.26 Other witnesses were strongly opposed to the idea of punitive action. The suggestion was described as 'bizarre' by one witness, who argued that punitive action would only serve to divide Indigenous parents and their children.[24] Some witnesses also suggested that high rates of truancy had more to do with culturally inappropriate schooling. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of witnesses, while not necessarily supporting punitive action, continued to maintain that Indigenous people needed to take action themselves, particularly in the area of attendance. This view was expressed strongly by Professor Paul Hughes from the Yungorrendi First Nations Centre in Flinders University.

> ... we have to have a lot more discussion amongst our own communities in terms of, firstly, the responsibilities of parents and individual students to be involved and participate in programs, and, secondly, for our community to understand that, unless they are involved in actually working together with schools and programs, they will not actually get out of the programs, study or systems the sorts of things that they wanted in the first place.[25]

3.27 Obviously, there is a wide divergence in opinion among Indigenous communities about the seriousness of school absenteeism. The Committee heard of strenuous and successful efforts made to get children to school. Also revealing was evidence from Cooktown High School teachers who related that in discussing the problem it was decided that a bus pick-up was not the best solution. The employment of an attendance support worker from the community was more promising, so long as the school was not seen as intruding on the community in order to get the children to school! The Committee notes that such reticence was not commonly reported to it.[26]

3.28 Irregular attendance is disruptive to the whole teaching and learning process in the classroom. It almost requires the running of parallel classes because irregular attendees are usually lagging behind the others. Irregular attendees require more remedial assistance as well as the right kinds of encouragement to improve their attendance record. This becomes a finely-balanced exercise in student management and may be beyond the skills of the inexperienced teachers who are more likely to be sent to remote areas.

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23 Precis of Evidence, Weipa, 3 August 1999, p. 1

24 Site Visit, comment by Simon Forrest, Geraldton, 13 September 1999

25 Professor Paul Hughes, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 328

26 Precis of Evidence, Cooktown, 2 August 1999, p. 8

3.29 The *Learning Lessons* report on Indigenous education in the Northern Territory cites an instance of tacit acceptance of high rates of absenteeism by some elements within the system administration and in some schools. One case study describes how the energetic work of a home liaison officer resulted in so many children attending school that the resources of the school were seriously over-stretched. The Northern Territory Department of Education refused to provide additional resources, in particular specialised teaching areas, on the grounds that attendance would eventually decline in the dry season – an historically accurate prediction of enrolment fluctuations - to a point where additional resources would be unnecessary. This became a self-fulfilling prophecy as children lost their enthusiasm in the overcrowded conditions of the school. The principal of the school reported that the additional enrolment of 200 children gave the community a 95 per cent school attendance figure, but any more than a 50 per cent level resulted in nervous breakdowns for teachers in the classrooms as they coped with fighting children and added stress.[27]

3.30 The Committee also heard evidence of a problem related to attendance: the view that attendance was seen by some as an end in itself. As Professor Paul Hughes related:

> Because of their own lack of understanding of education and the background of education, there is a feeling that if you send kids to school, or somebody rolls up at a TAFE college or enters another education program and turns up now and then, that has to be good enough, and that people will professionally do that. It has to do partly with people's lack of understanding about the need for consistent involvement and participation in those sorts of things, as much as a lack of understanding of the detail of the processes you have to go through in education to actually succeed. That is one bit; the need for our own community to be educated a bit more about the importance of being involved, the need for consistent attendance and the little things like homework and doing the bits and pieces that need to be done. If you do not do the work, you do not get the outcome.[28]

3.31 The Committee believes that educational institutions could do much more to accommodate Indigenous lifestyles. This seems to be an area where they have performed poorly in the past. The Committee was encouraged by the efforts of educators in such locations as Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Brewarrina to develop innovative approaches to dealing with issues such as transient lifestyles. The provision of support in terms of staffing and resources, and a strong focus on achieving good educational outcomes were critical features. The Committee also acknowledges the observation that issues such as attendance are ultimately a community responsibility. The Committee is not, however, persuaded that punitive action is an appropriate response on the part of Government. Such action runs the risk of dividing Indigenous

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27 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons, an independent review of Indigenous education*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, p. 65

28 *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 329

communities and families. The Committee also believes that the presence of appropriate support structures, at all levels but particularly in post-compulsory education, is essential in enhancing the cultural relevance of educational institutions for Indigenous people.

3.32 The Committee is aware of the work currently being undertaken by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs to develop a national Indigenous school attendance strategy.

Recommendation 8

3.33 The Committee commends DETYA for the development of a national Indigenous school attendance strategy and recommends that all necessary resources be supplied as a matter of urgency to enable its prompt implementation.

Racism

3.34 Racism is a reality for Indigenous people, according to ATSIC.[29] Overt racism in the form of abuse and vilification, or the experience of being treated as an inferior or in a patronising manner is one aspect of racism. There is evidence that this is a continuing problem in schools. In the course of its inquiry the Committee became familiar with what has been described as 'systemic' or 'institutional' racism. Its most common form is the failure to acknowledge the presence of Indigenous students and their culture in an educational setting, or to value their worth.

3.35 The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, which has conducted a number of studies on Indigenous education in recent years, says that clear empirical data on racism and cultural insensitivity are scarce, although these appear to be important factors influencing decisions by some Indigenous students to abandon school. A discussion paper produced by the Centre reports 1995 research suggesting that a significant number of early school leavers claim to have felt de-personalised and to have lost self-esteem under the pressure of racial harassment. This included racial abuse and vilification from teachers, negative comments about families, prejudicial treatment, and negative personal comments about 'extra money' and 'special benefits'.[30]

3.36 The Committee received some evidence and informal anecdotal information relating to racist behaviour, institutionalised or systemic racism and cultural insensitivity. In Adelaide, recent research commissioned by the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) on the South Australian Certificate of Education completion rates of Indigenous students suggested that the racism factor was significant.

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29 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 142

30 M. Grey, B. Hunter and RG Schwab, *A critical survey of Indigenous education outcomes, 1986-96*, Discussion Paper No. 170/1998, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra 1998, p. 18

> Racism was an enormous factor in terms of inhibiting Indigenous people in the successful attainment of educational outcomes. It was a consistent theme that came right through the research. Although institutional racism was mentioned sporadically by informants, students consistently commented on racial harassment from peers and students. In addition, students' perceptions of teachers as racist was compounded by a perceived lack of support from schools in addressing racism.[31]

3.37 At Coolgardie Primary School the Committee heard comments from the staff about racial taunts from bus drivers on the secondary school run from Coolgardie into Kalgoorlie. A witness in Townsville told the Committee that racism was far more of a problem in urban areas where Indigenous students were a minority than in the communities run by Indigenous people where their language and culture prevailed.[32]

3.38 On the issue of cultural insensitivity, the Committee heard in Kalgoorlie of the determination of the local district office of the Education Department of Western Australia to ensure that all staff, including principals, attend cultural awareness workshops. This was resisted, unsuccessfully, by a small number of principals. An Alice Springs witness, the secondary school Indigenous education officer, explained systemic racism as evidence that local Indigenous children felt uncomfortable in the school environment because the way schools were organised reflected a western cultural orientation.[33] This extended to language and behavioural expectations. Such self-critical labelling may be unjustified in this broad generalisation. The western orientation of schools would in most respects find supporters in the Indigenous community, although they would also expect schools to be welcoming and accepting of cultural differences.

3.39 More serious is the type of racism described as 'racism theory': the belief that Indigenous knowledges are not articulated, are seldom documented, and therefore do not exist. One witness in Adelaide gave evidence of resistance on the part of white children and their parents to Indigenous studies subjects in localities with large Indigenous populations. Non-Indigenous students often refuse to learn about Indigenous cultural and historical subjects. They argue that if they are to learn about this, then why not about other cultures as well. This indicates a poor perception about Indigenous people and their culture. Teachers have to break down stereotypical attitudes before progress can be made, and this is very difficult if only because conflict resolution is not something which teachers are trained to undertake.[34]

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31 Mr Lester Rigney, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 123

32 Mrs Dorothy Savage, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p .167

33 Ms Gillian Totham, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 257

34 Mr Lester Rigney, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p.132

Family life

3.40 The close kinship and other social ties which are at the core of Indigenous community life have masked the disrupted and troubled nature of family life in many communities. Alcoholism, substance abuse and domestic violence have been endemic problems for some years. The effect of this disruption on the education of children has been described in a statement to the NLLIA report on English language and literacy among remote Aboriginal communities:

> The incredible social disruption, lack of sleep, the very unpredictable nature of life from day to day, the lack of routine, not very often being sure whether you're going to get meals or not meals, whether your parents are going to be there, whether there's fights going on; I mean some of the children, particularly the teenagers; I'm thinking of young girls, some very often under threat of being married to someone they don't want. There's quite high levels of violence, of rape going on, all sorts of things I think are extremely traumatic and which the European teachers are often (though not always) totally unaware of, the experiences the children are going through, the children have all sorts of things to distract them from matters like learning to read and write.[35]

3.41 The home environment of many Indigenous students is also an issue. According to the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research there is ample evidence that Indigenous Australians suffer poorer quality and more crowded housing that do other Australians and that this is linked to poverty. Overcrowded households poorly equipped with domestic amenities are associated with poor school attendance rates, particularly for boys.

> It is likely that crowding affects attendance in many ways. Crowded houses are often noisy and disruptive. Clothing necessary to attend school is shared and sometimes disappears, books are lost, there is little room to study, and people come and go, disturbing sleep patterns. Older siblings are frequently required to baby-sit younger children. Tired children often fail to engage with learning and grow frustrated and disappointed with the educational experience. This, in turn, contributes to experiences of failure and further increases the likelihood of non-attendance.[36]

3.42 An earlier section in this chapter dealt briefly with the importance of kinship. Children quickly achieve a relatively high degree of independence with an extended family. One witness spoke of the importance of school authorities strengthening the hand of grandmothers because, at least in Alice Springs they were observed to exercise a great deal of influence.

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35 National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, *Desert Schools*, SA Teaching and Curriculum Centre, University of Adelaide and University of South Australia, Adelaide, 1996, vol. 2, p. 75

36 B Hunter and R B Schwarb, *The determinants of Indigenous educational outcomes*, No. 160/1998, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra, 1998, p. 14

> With the majority of younger children in transition to grade 3 who are regular attendees, the factor determining their regular attendance is very much the grandmother. Whether it is because of previous experiences... at the mission schools or whatever... the grandmothers give the impression that they are reasonably comfortable coming to school and bringing the little tackers along. Maybe we ought to be looking at ways of incorporating them into the school on a more regular basis, whether it be grandmother's day once a week or something. The grandmothers are significant people in the local community. Again, it is a value judgement on my part, but the grandmothers seem to hold the society together.[37]

3.43 The Committee noted that grandmothers and other extended family members had been involved in some schools and educational institutions for a number of years. Generally, the Committee found support for homework centres, although some schools preferred to use this funding for in-school tutorials. These schools found it more beneficial for students to have specialised support during school hours. The Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) was said to have had a beneficial effect for students from difficult home environments.

Crime and imprisonment

3.44 It is well-known that arrest and incarceration rates for Indigenous people are many times those for European Australians. From this Committee's viewpoint another statistic is just as serious and revealing. The experience of arrest reduces the probability of attending school by 26 per cent and 18 per cent for males and females respectively. Living in households where others have been arrested reduces the probability of attending school by an additional 23 per cent and 20 per cent for males and females respectively.[38]

3.45 Hunter and Schwab give several reasons why arrest has an adverse effect on educational achievement. The first is that detention in either a youth detention centre or a jail directly interferes with the process of human capital formation (education, training and social development) by removing individuals from familiar surroundings. Secondly, while people in detention have more time to study, they often have less motivation to do so, particularly if their educational attainments are already low, as they generally are. The experience of arrest and imprisonment significantly reduces employment possibilities and further diminishes the incentive to continue their education in detention.[39]

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37 Br Paul Gilchrist, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 271

38 B Hunter and R G Schwab, *The determinants of Indigenous educational outcomes*, No.160/1998, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra, 1998, p. v

39 *ibid.*, p. 7

Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

3.46 The involvement of Indigenous people with the criminal justice system has been the subject of a number of reports, the most important arising from concern at the high incidence of deaths in custody of Aboriginal people during the 1980s. The Commonwealth, States and the Northern Territory appointed a Royal Commission headed by Commissioner Elliott Johnston, QC, to investigate the deaths of 99 Aboriginal people in police custody, prisons and juvenile detention centres. The Royal Commission operated between October 1987 and April 1991 at the end of which time a comprehensive five volume national report and numerous regional reports were presented.[40] Indigenous education issues were dealt with in some detail and a number of recommendations made which have much wider application than the justice system.

3.47 The Commission noted that, of the 99 Aboriginal people who died in custody, eight had no formal schooling, 20 had some primary school education, 12 had completed primary school, 50 had some secondary schooling, two had completed secondary school, two had some technical or other vocational education, while only one had completed vocational training.[41] The Royal Commission found that non-participation in school was likely to result in young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being introduced to the juvenile justice system at an early age.[42]

3.48 Improving the educational opportunities of Indigenous children and adults was seen as one way of trying to reduce the high incarceration rate of Indigenous people. However, lack of education was considered not only a factor in the greater likelihood of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people offending, but also a factor in their likelihood of re-offending.[43] It was therefore also important to provide comparable educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the prison system. The Royal Commission stated that imprisonment 'offers an opportunity for prisoners to develop skills and attitudes able to assist their re-integration into society.'[44] Accordingly, the Royal Commission recommended that corrective service authorities ensure that Indigenous prisoners be given the opportunity to undertake courses in self-development, skills acquisition and vocational education and training, and to perform useful work.[45]

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40 Recommendations related to Indigenous education are contained in the following chapters of the *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*: Chapters 11 (rec 55) and 16 (rec 72) (Volume 2); Chapters 22 (rec 110) and 25 (rec 185) (Volume 3); and Chapter 33 (recs 289-299) (Volume 4)

41 *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* vol. 3, p. 339. The educational attainment of the remaining four people was unknown.

42 *ibid.*, p. 338

43 *ibid.*, p. 340

44 *ibid*

45 *ibid*, p. 353

3.49 While noting the overall increase in availability of courses in correctional facilities and participation in these courses by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Royal Commission recommended that the Commonwealth education department develop a national strategy designed to improve education and training opportunities for those in custody. The Royal Commission recommended that state education departments and correctional service authorities, along with adult education providers, in particular the independent Indigenous-controlled providers, should also be involved in this strategy of devising suitable education and training programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders.[46] The objective of this strategy was to extend the aims of the Indigenous Education Policy and Indigenous Employment Development Policy to Indigenous people in prisons.[47]

3.50 Assuming that the rehabilitation of offenders should be a goal of all correctional service authorities, the Royal Commission recommended that Indigenous prisoners who undertake education or training courses during hours when other prisoners are involved in remunerated work, should receive the same level of remuneration.[48] The Royal Commission stated that providing prisoners with appropriate forms of employment and the opportunity to develop skills that will lead to employment outside prison is essential.

3.51 Despite the Commission's first recommendation that Aboriginal organisations should be involved in the implementation of the Commission's inquiries, and despite the support given by the Commission to those independent Aboriginal education providers that made a submission to its inquiry, the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers advised the Committee that since then 'not one of these providers has been specifically approached by the Commonwealth or the relevant State and Territory government agencies to ascertain whether the "local implementation" of the relevant recommendations of the Commission accorded with their expectations.'[49] The Federation undertook its own evaluation of progress on the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations during 1997.

3.52 In relation to recommendations on Aboriginal prison education, the Federation stated that 'evidence from the Aboriginal controlled-providers themselves is that these recommendations have not been properly addressed'.[50] In one state, correctional authorities were not prepared to provide the necessary resources required by independent providers to deliver the programs, turning instead to the TAFE system. This was despite the preference of Aboriginal prisoners to have the independent Aboriginal education providers involved.[51]

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46 *ibid.*

47 *ibid.*, Recommendation 185, p. 353

48 *ibid.*, Recommendation 186, p. 357

49 Submission No. 15, Mr Jack Beetson, vol. 1, p. 151

50 Submission No. 15, Mr Jack Beetson, vol 1, p. 199

51 *ibid*

3.53 Again, contrary to Royal Commission Recommendation 192, a pilot program aimed at evaluating the impact on recidivism of pre and post release education and training programs for Indigenous prisoners was put out to tender and won by the state's own correctional services education division. Only one Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, Tauondi College, was invited to take part in the pilot program.[52]

Report of the Senate Inquiry into Education and Training in Correctional Facilities

3.54 In its 1996 report on prison education, the Senate References Committee on Employment, Education and Training commented on education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners.

3.55 The Committee noted various state government efforts to have Aboriginal tutors and teachers deliver education programs to Indigenous inmates in response to Royal Commission recommendations but observed that implementation had been slow.[53] The Committee recommended Aboriginal prisoners have access to education programs conducted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers.[54] In response, the Commonwealth Government expressed its support for the Committee's recommendation. It advised that state or territory institutions, or persons providing post secondary education or researching or advising on education, could apply for funds under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP). While it was the responsibility of those persons or organisations receiving the funds to employ Indigenous teachers to deliver programs to Indigenous prisoners, the Commonwealth advised that employing Indigenous people wherever possible was a formal condition of the contract between the Commonwealth and funding recipients.[55]

3.56 The Committee also recommended that the Commonwealth Government convene a meeting of state and territory ministers responsible for correctional services to sign the National Memorandum of Agreement on Education and Training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Custody, which was at the draft stage at the time of the Committee's inquiry.[56] The Committee considered that 'such a Memorandum must be expedited and the implementation of the Strategy must be accorded the highest priority'.[57] The Commonwealth Government, in response to the Committee's report, advised that the draft of the Memorandum would be considered at

52 *ibid*

53 Senate References Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education and Training in Correctional Facilities*, Canberra, 1996, p. 44

54 *ibid.*, p. 45

55 Government response to Senate References Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education and Training in Correctional Facilities*, 5 February 1997, pp. 8-9

56 Senate References Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education and Training in Correctional Facilities*, Canberra, 1996, p. 47

57 *ibid*

the next Corrective Services Administrators' Conference.[58] The Committee understands that this memorandum has been signed by all relevant state and territory ministers since June 1999, albeit with an amendment to the effect that it applies only to adult prisoners.

Conclusion

3.57 The weight of evidence provided to the Committee confirms the finding that 'family and social variables dominate the decision to stay on at school'.[59] Some people will argue that this means there is limited scope for government action to improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous people. This is not the position of the Committee. Social policy has to take into account the cultural condition of people and the pace at which they find change to be acceptable. Self-determination may be seen as a process through which Indigenous people, in their widely varying social environments, make decisions about the extent to which they will interact with other Australians in the economic life of the dominant culture. This chapter has dealt with social factors affecting education which must be understood but which do not offer much prospect for improvement without action across a range of fields.

3.58 Indigenous lifestyles interact with and affect education systems. While some of these issues are a matter for Indigenous communities to determine, others require the attention of governments in consultation with Indigenous people. Education systems themselves can do much to improve aspects of schooling which affect student outcomes. This includes the way in which schools interact with Indigenous lifestyles. The Committee saw some examples of the ways in which schools and other educational institutions are attempting to deal with issues such as highly mobile populations and absenteeism. These examples are described further in the chapters on curriculum and diversity. The Committee also believes schools have a role to play in dealing with broader community issues such as racism. While these issues require broader community action, educational institutions can do much through leadership and commitment.

3.59 Another serious social problem relates to the high rate of imprisonment. The Committee does not have criminology in its terms of reference to this inquiry, apart from its relevance to education. However, it fails to understand why there has been a less than adequate commitment to many of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. There is surely scope for some degree of self-determination in addressing this serious problem. The effect of crime reduction would have a highly beneficial effect on educational outcomes.

3.60 There is also a need for ATSIC and the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) to play a more pro-active role in the

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58 Government response to Senate References Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education and Training in Correctional Facilities*, 5 February 1997, p. 9

59 B Hunter and R G Schwab, *The determinants of indigenous educational outcomes*, Discussion Paper No. 160/1998, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, p. vi

monitoring and reporting of the National Commitment. The National Commitment for Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders was signed by all governments (Commonwealth, state and territories, and local governments) in 1992, and endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments. The Committee believes this will promote both continuous improvement across portfolios, and a whole of government approach to the diverse programs and services governments provide Indigenous people. It may also increase opportunities for self-determination.

Recommendation 9

3.61 The Committee recommends that MCEETYA facilitate discussions with Commonwealth and State agencies to coordinate initiatives to improve the participation rates and educational outcomes of Indigenous communities.

CHAPTER 4

CURRICULUM

4.1 In August 1999 the Committee met educators and community members from the Townsville region at a public hearing. During the meeting the Committee asked about the educational expectations of Indigenous parents from urban areas like Townsville. An important element was the need for a good mainstream education that would enable their children to compete equitably in the labour market. Equally important, however, was the need for Indigenous people to maintain a connection with their cultural and linguistic heritage. One Indigenous educator from Townsville summed up this position.

> We want our children to achieve in the mainstream, but we do not want them to forget their identity and grassroots, most importantly. We want them to hold on to their language, but be articulate in other languages as well.[1]

4.2 The two aims of mainstream educational achievement and the incorporation of Indigenous cultural values into the curriculum have driven much policy making over the past decade. They have been seen at various times as both complementary and contradictory. Evidence of some of these tensions arose in the course of the inquiry and are explored in this chapter.

4.3 The chapter also surveys some of the recommendations that have been made in relation to curriculum over the past ten years, and looks at the impact of more general developments in curriculum theory. The main areas covered include:

- cultural inclusiveness and the mainstream curriculum;
- other curriculum developments in the schools sector and their implications for Indigenous education;
- the implementation of Indigenous studies subjects for all students;
- developments in vocational education and training, and adult education; and
- the impact of new technologies on the curriculum.

4.4 A key point to note in relation to curriculum is the relatively limited role of the Commonwealth. Much of the practical work in curriculum development has taken place at the state or territory level. Through its involvement in national Indigenous education policy, however, the Commonwealth has played a part in attempts to introduce more culturally inclusive curricula across the various education systems and

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1 Mrs Dorothy Savage, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 169

has also influenced curriculum development through other funding and policy initiatives.

4.5 Currently, the Commonwealth is developing an Indigenous literacy and numeracy strategy. The strategy will aim to encourage school systems to rethink teaching practices and develop more relevant curricula for Indigenous students. The Commonwealth also funds intensive English language tuition for Indigenous language speaking students under ESL funding. Under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) the Commonwealth provides supplementary funding for Indigenous education projects aimed at trialing ways to overcome barriers to educational achievement. In the higher education sector, the Indigenous Support Funding Program assists institutions to develop Indigenous education strategies. Some Commonwealth funding has also gone towards developments in Open Learning. Another curriculum area of importance has been that of vocational education and training programs in schools, and school to work pathways. The Commonwealth School to Work Transition for Indigenous Australians Taskforce has been looking at this area.[2]

Cultural inclusiveness and the mainstream curriculum

> ... educational gain amongst young people is slow and generational. It is even more so when people from one culture are being schooled by people from another and quite different culture.[3]

4.6 The central curriculum issue in Indigenous education over the past decade has been how to provide a curriculum that is both academically rigorous and culturally relevant to Indigenous peoples. In the various inquiries conducted during this period, Indigenous people have called for a curriculum that provides the opportunity for them to participate in mainstream society and also to maintain their languages, cultures and spiritual beliefs. An important aspect of this has been the need for a curriculum that responds to and reflects the level of cultural diversity of the Indigenous population.

4.7 However, there is no consensus on the importance of cultural issues in the curriculum. A number of questions are raised in the literature, with a corresponding range of opinions. One question is the extent to which the curriculum needs to take cultural factors into account. Another is the extent to which education systems, and the curriculum, reflect and reinforce social structures that serve to perpetuate economic inequality among marginalised peoples, and whether there may be a need for more fundamental reform of mainstream educational institutions.

4.8 The basic assumption underpinning most educational policy is that education is beneficial and allows individuals to participate more fully in mainstream society. The assumption that education brings benefits has not always been true for Indigenous peoples, at least in terms of western education systems. In Australia, educational

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2 Submission No. 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, vol. 4, pp. 56-69

3 Submission No. 7, Mr Peter Reynolds, vol. 1, p. 52

policy towards Indigenous peoples has at various times involved segregation and assimilation. Only more recently has self-determination been recognised. In the past, schools have actively participated in the suppression of Indigenous languages and cultures, and the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. One submission from the Australian Education Union asked the Committee to note its 'formal apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for the role that educators and schools had in the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities'.[4] Although education systems no longer take such a deliberately oppressive role, they retain elements of assimilation and institutionalised racism that can make them alienating environments for many Indigenous people.

4.9 Critiques of assimilation, and of western education systems and curricula as assimilationist, dominate much of the literature on Indigenous education. Mainstream education systems can be seen as assimilationist in the sense that one of their aims is to prepare students for participation in mainstream society. The ability to participate in mainstream society, however, is seen as essential by many Indigenous communities. The Committee notes in particular ideas expressed by Torres Strait Islander academic Dr Martin Nakata who argues the proposition that Indigenous people do not stand in a separate domain from the western world: that the relationship is one of complementarity rather than separateness.

> If attention to cultural difference results in a more culturally sensitive pedagogy that is without doubt a good thing. But if, in the end it has a negligible or limited effect on outcomes, or if difficulties with acquiring academic skills persist, then I think we have to be honest enough to admit that the strategies of cultural difference agenda are not sufficient to deliver the standards we are pursuing.[5]

4.10 The Committee received a great deal of evidence that access to mainstream educational services is what most Indigenous people want. In 1989 the NATSIEP Joint Policy Statement commented that 'numerous reviews, inquiries and consultations conducted in recent years have all demonstrated that Aboriginal people place a high priority on education'.[6] Representatives of the communities visited in the inquiry spoke of the need for access to mainstream educational opportunities and for high teaching standards.

4.11 If Indigenous people want access to mainstream education, they also want an education that is welcoming and accepting of Indigenous culture and values. Stephen Harris put it this way: 'Aboriginal parents have a short answer to the dilemma: their

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4 Submission No. 24, Australian Education Union, vol. 2, p. 121

5 Dr Martin Nakata, 'Cutting a Better Deal for Torres Strait Islanders', *Youth Studies Australia*, Summer 1995, p. 32

6 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement*, Canberra, 1989, p. 9

children need to learn the three Rs and to grow up Aboriginal'.[7] This perspective was reflected in evidence given to the Committee in Townsville.

The case for a culturally inclusive curriculum

4.12 There are a number of arguments that can be used to support a more culturally inclusive curriculum. Western educational institutions have traditionally been alienating environments for Indigenous people, and many institutions remain so today. Implementation of a more culturally inclusive curriculum, it is argued, could help reduce some of these institutional barriers to Indigenous educational participation. It might also have a positive effect on levels of self-esteem and identity for Indigenous students.

4.13 Teaching a culturally appropriate curriculum, which recognises and builds on the cultural and linguistic background of Indigenous students, could also aid learning across the curriculum. Some studies have suggested, for example, that bilingual education assists acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills for students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

4.14 Cultural issues can be important motivating factors in communities where the traditional benefits of education, such as improved employment prospects, are less obvious. A greater acknowledgment and understanding of Indigenous culture can also open the way for the involvement of the wider Indigenous community in education.

4.15 Finally, and by no means least importantly, acknowledgment of cultural issues can help in the maintenance of Indigenous cultures and languages. Indigenous studies subjects also have a role to play in spreading the cultural and linguistic heritage of Indigenous communities to the wider community, and aiding in the reconciliation process.

Critical perspectives on culturally inclusive curricula

4.16 There are a number of concerns regarding the incorporation of Indigenous cultural values into the curriculum. One of the central concerns has been that it may have led, in some instances, to poor curriculum and teaching practices. One submission to the inquiry, for instance, described the education available to secondary aged Aboriginal students at Community Education Centres (CECs) in remote parts of the Northern Territory.

> The CEC's offer young Aboriginal secondary-aged students a watered down syllabus, which amounts to a 'post-primary' education, based on a series of curriculum documents many of which are a strange amalgam of nativism and assimilationism.[8]

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7 Stephen Harris, *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, p. 137

8 Submission No. 12, Dr Christine Nicholls, vol 1, p. 141

4.17 Some writers have been critical of the primacy of cultural issues in Indigenous education policy, arguing that this has shifted the focus away from the need for good mainstream education. They caution against the danger that acknowledgment and incorporation of cultural differences in education systems may mean an acceptance of different, and lower, educational outcomes.[9] An assumption that Indigenous people are less able to undertake subjects such as science and mathematics, for example, is seen as one of the dangers of an over-emphasis on cultural factors.

4.18 Some cultural approaches have also tended to treat Indigenous cultures as static victims of mainstream cultural domination. This has been criticised as simplistic, with some writers pointing to the dynamic nature of Indigenous cultures and the ways in which they interact with and use aspects of mainstream culture.

4.19 Some writers have also pointed to the ways in which cultural approaches fail to recognise the level of cultural diversity among Indigenous Australians. Much of the literature on cultural differences focuses on remote and more traditionally oriented societies. While these are important areas with specific needs (in some cases representing the most educationally disadvantaged of all Indigenous Australian communities), they are not where most Indigenous people live. Many Indigenous Australians live in cities or large regional centres and speak English as their first or only language. Cultural issues may also be important in these areas but the nature and extent of these issues will vary widely.

The Committee's position

4.20 While these are difficult issues to resolve, the Committee believes that education systems have an important role to play in the social and economic advancement of Indigenous peoples and should receive due support and recognition from governments. It is fundamental that Indigenous people should have access to the same educational opportunities as all Australians. This includes access to curriculum that is educationally challenging as well as culturally appropriate. It is also axiomatic that good educational practice takes into account the background and needs of the student. There is strong evidence that cultural issues are important for Indigenous people and should be taken into account in curriculum design. There is also evidence that this may have resulted in poor curriculum in the past. Cultural inclusiveness should not be at the expense of academic standards. Consideration of cultural issues should also take into account the level of cultural diversity of the Indigenous population.

4.21 There are also two issues involved in the debate over curriculum and Indigenous culture. One is the attempt to improve levels of mainstream educational achievement and the extent to which culturally inclusive curricula need to be incorporated into the mainstream curriculum. The other is the separate but related issue of the teaching of Indigenous cultures and languages to both Indigenous and

9 Dr Martin Nakata, 'History, Cultural Diversity and English Language Teaching', *Ngoonjook: A Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, July 1997, p. 64

non-Indigenous students. These areas tend to overlap, particularly in more traditionally oriented communities, but are different in terms of educational aims. The use of Indigenous languages in bilingual or 'both ways' education, for example, is a different issue to the teaching of Indigenous languages as part of the Languages Other Than English (LOTE) curriculum. The first is concerned with the use of language and culture across the curriculum while the second is concerned with the specific teaching of language and culture.

Recommendations from previous Inquiries

4.22 Inquiries into Indigenous education have focussed on recommendations relating both to participation in the mainstream curriculum and the incorporation of Indigenous cultural values into the curriculum.

4.23 The 1988 Hughes report highlighted the importance of cultural issues and also the central role of education in achieving the income and employment equity objectives of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP). In part, the focus on cultural issues was seen as a response to curricula that had involved the suppression of Indigenous cultures in the past. The challenge was to find better ways to provide access to the benefits of mainstream education.

> Perhaps the most challenging issue of all is to ensure education is available to all Aboriginal people in a manner that reinforces rather than suppresses their unique cultural identity.[10]

4.24 The report recommended the provision of funds for curriculum development in early childhood education and the schools sector, as well as the provision of bridging and orientation courses, and the development of off-campus and external study programs in vocational education and higher education. The report also recommended the establishment of eight Aboriginal Education Centres in higher education institutions, and the provision of guidelines to ensure that higher education courses acknowledged the validity of Indigenous cultural issues. In addition, the report called for programs that would provide all Australian students with 'a curriculum that includes Aboriginal Studies, in order to increase their understanding of Aboriginal culture and enhance their sensitivity towards the needs of their Aboriginal peers'.[11]

4.25 The 1990 NATSIEP Joint Policy Statement pointed to the importance of cultural issues in Indigenous education. Lack of sensitivity to Indigenous cultural issues was said to be one among a range of factors behind low levels of participation.

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10 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force*, Canberra, 1988, p. 2

11 *ibid.*, p. 17

> Aboriginal youth are more likely to participate in education and develop learning competencies when ... the curriculum is, and is perceived to be, relevant and appropriate.[12]

4.26 The Joint Policy set out nine goals in the area of equitable and appropriate educational outcomes, which covered curriculum related issues. Five of these (goals 13, 14, 15, 16 and 19) involved the achievement of equitable mainstream educational outcomes, while three (goals 17, 18 and 20) involved Indigenous cultural or community development issues. A further goal (goal 21) covered the provision of Indigenous studies subjects to all students.[13]

4.27 The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody also made some recommendations in relation to the curriculum. These related to parental and community participation in educational services, the importance of pre-school programs, the need for more Indigenous teachers, improving prison education resources and opportunities, additional funding for community controlled programs, and the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters.[14]

4.28 The 1994 review of Indigenous education examined curriculum issues in relation to the achievement of 'appropriate and equitable outcomes'. The review dealt largely with cultural issues in the curriculum. The review highlighted the tension existing between notions of 'equitable' and 'appropriate' outcomes for Indigenous people. The review endorsed the use of 'both ways' approaches in Indigenous education and also strongly emphasised the importance of literacy development.[15] Some writers have criticised the review for over-emphasising the importance of cultural issues.

4.29 The review covered the following main curriculum areas in its recommendations:

- the development of courses of study in Indigenous languages (recommendation 24);
- the identification and provision of appropriate English as a Second Language support to Indigenous students whose first language was not English, as well as increased Commonwealth funding (recommendations 25 and 26);
- support for Indigenous studies courses at all levels of education (recommendations 27 and 28); and

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12 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement*, Canberra, 1989, p. 13

13 *ibid.*, p. 15

14 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 130-131

15 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, p. 91

- additional Commonwealth funding for the Vocational Education and Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme (VEGAS) (recommendation 29).

4.30 The 1995 MCEETYA National Strategy reflected these concerns and made a strong case for culturally relevant curricula. 'It is now time that Indigenous culture, language and history become a part of all education and training programs by integrating Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum.'[16] The Strategy covered areas of pre-service education for teachers, programs of language and cultural maintenance, the teaching of Indigenous languages as part of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) programs, and the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum.

4.31 Priority six of the National Strategy focussed specifically on Indigenous cultures, languages and history, calling on education systems 'to promote, maintain and support the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, cultures and languages to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students'. This teaching was seen as being of particular importance for Indigenous students. Among other factors, the provision of a 'culturally relevant curriculum' would contribute to a supportive learning environment, enhanced confidence and self-esteem, and improved learning outcomes.[17] The key outcomes included increased knowledge of Indigenous cultures among all students, and greater access to Indigenous language programs.

4.32 Priorities four and five also touched on curriculum issues and addressed some of the tensions that arise in trying to implement culturally relevant curricula. Priority four called on education systems 'to ensure participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in education and training'. The National Strategy identified limitations in curricula, including 'cultural context, teaching styles and forms of organisation and assessment', as one of the barriers to increased Indigenous educational participation.[18]

4.33 Priority five concerned equitable and appropriate educational achievement for Indigenous students. As in the earlier review, the strategy highlighted the tension between 'equitable' and 'appropriate' achievement. While focussing on mainstream educational outcomes such as increased levels of English language literacy and numeracy, priority five acknowledged the need for culturally inclusive methodologies and recognised that there was much work yet to be done in this area. The Strategy endorsed the call in the 1994 National Review for 'a concentrated effort and a major investment in literacy development by the Commonwealth and the education providers'.[19] Access to English as a Second Language programs and teaching strategies were seen as crucial.

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16 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002*, Canberra, 1996, p. 61

17 *ibid.*, pp. 61-62

18 *ibid.*, p. 40

19 *ibid.*, p. 51

Findings

4.34 A recurring theme throughout the literature is the tension between the objective of success in the mainstream curriculum and the extent to which cultural issues need to be addressed in achieving success. There were a range of opinions on this in the hearings, to some extent reflecting the level of diversity within and between Indigenous communities.

4.35 Staff from some of the larger regional and urban high schools, where Indigenous students formed a significant proportion of the population but were not in a majority, tended to put a strong emphasis on mainstream educational achievement. In Dubbo, for instance, they were using targeted funds to provide intensive Reading Recovery programs for Indigenous students, and considered that they had achieved some significant increases in literacy levels. On the issue of cultural relevance, the principal commented that schools needed to recognise that they had children for a limited time, and that their priorities needed to be on the acquisition of basic skills.

> ... the one thing that I am convinced of is that nothing does more for an Aboriginal student's self-esteem than being as good at reading, writing and arithmetic as all the other kids. ... The reality of it is that we do not have any Aboriginal programs. All that we have got is good teaching programs for all kids.[20]

4.36 This was an approach that received qualified endorsement from some Indigenous people in relation to issues of culture and language.

> I have always been taught, and I certainly stand by this today, that the languages I have on both my mother's and my father's side are something that I will never lose. I do not need anybody to put it into print to retain it for me, and I do not need anybody to teach me or my children what my language is. What I need is to ensure that the resources, policies, and the attitudes of mainstream Australia in terms of Indigenous education and Indigenous needs are the focus of our effort. It is important to have language there, but it is not an absolute priority.[21]

4.37 This was also a concern that was raised in terms of access to education in some of the more remote locations. One submission from the Jilkminggan community near Katherine called for a wide range of mainstream secondary subjects such as science to be made available to students in their community.[22] Some concerns were also expressed about the quality of education offered to students at Community Education Centres in the Northern Territory. One submission described it as 'a watered down syllabus'. This submission was critical of the failure to provide the same secondary curriculum as that provided to non-Indigenous students irrespective of

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20 Mr Des O'Malley, *Hansard*, Bourke, 26 July 1999, p. 70

21 Mr Roger Thomas, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 95

22 Submission No. 2, Jilkminggan School Council, vol. 1, pp. 12-14

their location, ability or achievement. The submission argued for strategies to ensure the provision of a full secondary education to all students in the Northern Territory.

> The argument that Aboriginal youth are not 'ready' for 'proper' secondary education programmes, and so therefore should be offered 'transitional' education programmes, is not ultimately a valid one.[23]

4.38 Active pursuit of mainstream educational outcomes and a belief that Indigenous students should not be denied access to educational opportunities was said to be achieving results in some areas. Brewarrina Central School, for example, had taken this approach and reported significant improvements in retention to Year 11 and 12. Active support from staff was seen as vital for students who would be completing schooling through distance education. While there were limitations involved in relying on distance education for some subjects, the school had taken the approach that they would not deny the students access to any subjects they wanted to take. According to the principal, 'I want people to see years 11 and 12 as a possibility for students.'[24]

4.39 Most educational institutions with large Indigenous populations also supported the need to take Indigenous cultural issues into account. The extent of this need and the emphasis placed on it varied between locations. In one of the primary schools in Cairns the Committee was told that the main difficulty in relation to Indigenous students had been the way the curriculum was delivered in a mainstream school. Discussions with parents resulted in a list of twelve required learning styles. These were used to design educational programs, with the aim of preparing the Indigenous students for success in mainstream education.[25]

4.40 Most of the State Indigenous education advisory groups have developed plans that include provisions for culturally inclusive curricula. Participants in a research project on year 12 completion in South Australia considered that inclusive curriculum practices were central to successful outcomes. The Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum (APAC) package, developed in South Australia, was identified as one positive strategy by teachers, schools and parents.[26]

4.41 Some submissions and witnesses were highly critical of the perceived failure of mainstream educational institutions to provide a culturally relevant curriculum for Indigenous students. High rates of truancy among young Indigenous people in some government schools in the Northern Territory, for example, were said to reflect inappropriate curriculum and teaching methods. Levels of attendance were said by

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23 Submission No. 12, Dr Christine Nicholls, vol. 1, pp. 141-143

24 Miss Ruythe Dufty, *Hansard*, Brewarrina, 26 July 1999, p. 19

25 Caravonica Primary School, *Hansard Precis*, Cairns, 2 August 1999, pp. 1-2

26 Mr Lester Irabinna Rigney, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 137

some witnesses to be higher in those institutions which provided a 'culturally appropriate pedagogy serving the needs of Indigenous students'.[27]

4.42 In some instances, the consideration of cultural issues extended to a belief that different forms of teaching and assessment were appropriate for Indigenous people. This was most strongly felt in relation to issues of language. The principal of the Catholic primary school in Bourke, for example, made the following comment.

> I feel very strongly that the country and the government really have to look at other forms of literacy that are more suited to Indigenous children's learning. Yours and our ways of reading text and of looking at a book and putting information together do not work with Indigenous students.[28]

4.43 Another area where social and cultural differences were seen as important was that of higher education, particularly in those fields where there were pressing needs for Indigenous professionals (such as health and education).

> Trends in government policy to reward retention and completion are trends we all aspire to meet. Nevertheless, just getting people here and participation going is really the primary task that we see for ourselves. Whilst we are committed to improving performance of students, we still regard ourselves as in a developmental phase where participation of Indigenous students, whether they stay for the whole or partial completion of a course or simply come and do not even complete a large number of subjects, are all achievements for the context in which we are working.[29]

4.44 The general consensus of opinion was that educational institutions needed to prepare Indigenous students for mainstream educational participation and achievement. However, there was also a strong view in many areas that this needed to involve recognition of Indigenous language and cultural issues. One example of this was the recognition of Aboriginal English as a form of language usage and not as simply an example of 'bad' English. In more remote and traditionally oriented communities this extended to the use of bilingual and 'both ways' education.

4.45 Some witnesses suggested that the traditional culture and lifestyles of Indigenous peoples were incompatible with European educational systems, and that success in mainstream education might require Indigenous communities to change their behaviour in regard to issues such as attendance. There was a suggestion from some witnesses that governments ought to consider withholding welfare payments for non-attendance, although this idea was strongly resisted by other witnesses.

4.46 In some quarters there was a perception that 'back to basics' methods may have produced better educational outcomes in the past. The old 'mission school'

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27 Submission No. 4, Mr Peter Toyne MLA, vol. 1, p. 23

28 Brother Mark Fordyce, *Hansard*, Bourke, 26 July 1999, p. 64

29 Professor Robin McTaggart, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 152

approach, where Indigenous people 'were basically forced to go to school to survive', was seen by some witnesses as having produced higher levels of literacy among the older generation.[30] This perception is probably true for some locations. It has been accepted by the *Learning Lessons* report as being true of the Northern Territory. Comment to this effect comes from older Indigenous people and from experienced teachers. As will be noted later in this chapter, however, anecdotal evidence of a recent decline in standards is not supported by the national data. Historically, most Indigenous people received an education that strongly emphasised the acquisition of basic skills through traditional teaching methods. On the basis of levels of participation and achievement alone, the educational benefits have been debatable and may have contributed to reluctance on the part of Indigenous parents to engage in and contribute to education. The emphasis on the need for more inclusive curriculum and teaching practices has been in large measure a response to the failings of more traditional approaches.

4.47 One of the dilemmas articulated in the National Review was over whether it was simply that mainstream education needed to be made more culturally relevant or whether a more radical approach needed to be taken to concepts of mainstream education.[31] The predominant view in the hearings and submissions seemed to be that, for the majority of Indigenous peoples, the realities of economic power required access to and participation in mainstream education. However, this was less strongly felt in remote areas where economic opportunities were more severely limited.

4.48 The Commonwealth funds a number of programs which involve curriculum-related areas. The Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) provides supplementary funding for Indigenous education based on the numbers of Indigenous enrolments. Strategic results projects are aimed at trialing ways to overcome barriers to educational achievement for Indigenous people. In the higher education sector the main source of Commonwealth funding is the Indigenous Support Funding Program, which assists institutions to develop Indigenous education strategies. Some Commonwealth funding has also gone towards developments in Open Learning.

'Two way' education

4.49 In *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling* Stephen Harris explored some of the dilemmas facing Indigenous communities in their attempts to reconcile mainstream European education with Indigenous cultural values and aspirations.

30 Mr Lester Kerber, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 270

31 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, p. 85

> A two way school is designed not so much to limit the choices of Aboriginal students but to clarify what the choices are and to provide the training necessary for making living in both domains a real possibility in adult life.[32]

4.50 'Two way' or 'both ways' learning has been embraced by many remote Indigenous communities and by many educators working with these communities. The basic principle of 'two way' schooling is that learning should involve a two-way exchange of knowledge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Educational institutions need to acknowledge Indigenous cultures and languages and to recognise the significant skills possessed by Indigenous peoples. A critical aspect is the involvement of the whole community in education.

4.51 One example of two way education in practice was provided in the Goldfields Education District of Western Australia. The district covers approximately one third of Western Australia and includes some of the most remote schools in the world. The district is divided into three areas: the Town, the North Country and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Indigenous people from the Lands were predominantly non-English speakers while those from the North Country spoke Aboriginal English.

4.52 Curriculum delivery was looked at in two ways. It involved, firstly, the acknowledgment of Aboriginal people as ESL speakers, including those whose first language was Aboriginal English. The Committee was told that it had taken a long time for the teaching community to acknowledge Aboriginal English as a language in its own right, with standard grammatical structures. An important aim of the District Education Office was to ensure that teachers were ESL skilled. Secondly, curriculum delivery involved acknowledging Aboriginal culture as a key focus. Prior Indigenous learning and cultural understandings were acknowledged, rather than forcing European learning and culture on Aboriginal students. The acknowledgment of Aboriginal students as second language speakers was said to have made a great difference in attitudes to education, although the difference had not yet been documented.[33]

4.53 'Both ways' approaches were also important in some areas of post-compulsory education. Programs at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory followed a 'both ways' philosophy, with the aim of bringing together 'Indigenous and Western knowledge and academic traditions'.[34]

4.54 The recognition of Indigenous languages has important implications for curriculum delivery. The 1994 National Review supported the recognition and use of Indigenous languages in the curriculum.

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32 Stephen Harris, *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, p. 20

33 Goldfields District Education Office, *Hansard Precis*, Kalgoorlie, 14 September 1999

34 Submission No. 36, Ms Veronica Arbon, vol. 5, p. 205

> We believe that forms of education which are based on the recognition and acceptance of a child's first language as a legitimate form of communication best serve the educational needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and have recommended increased levels of ESL support for these children.[35]

4.55 As in Kalgoorlie, a number of locations were moving to recognise and accept forms of language usage such as Kriol and Aboriginal English. The majority of students at Jilkminggan School near Katherine, for example, spoke Kriol. In their submission to the inquiry, the Jilkminggan community identified ESL teaching as an important need.[36] Recognition of Aboriginal English was also identified as an important issue in the Alice Springs region.

> We have a lot of young Indigenous students who come speaking Aboriginal English. For a long time we have looked at them as students who speak English poorly, so we correct their English.[37]

4.56 Some witnesses favoured a more traditional approach. At Yirara College, in Central Australia, literacy was seen as central to all curriculum areas. The majority of students were from a non-English speaking background, and came to the College 'specifically to be put in an English language-dominant environment'. The College provided a broad curriculum covering pathways into secondary education or TAFE, mainstream junior secondary courses, intensive literacy and numeracy instruction, as well as Indigenous language programs. The emphasis was on 'intensive education in the non-Indigenous domain'.

> ... they and their families want to be able to walk into a restaurant in a major town or stay in a motel or visit a city without feeling 'shamed'.[38]

4.57 'Two way' schooling and bilingual education have attracted some criticism for concentrating too much on cultural maintenance, and for placing less emphasis on mainstream educational achievement. The Committee heard some criticisms of bilingual education, in particular, as well as some expressions of support. The criticisms centred on the lack of fluent bilingual teachers, problems involved in teaching written versions of oral languages, and the lack of a significant body of literature in Indigenous languages.[39] These witnesses considered that there was a need to put more resources into ESL approaches. Those witnesses who supported bilingual education pointed to the desire by some Indigenous communities to retain their languages and the positive effect on attendance. Some of the perceptions of failure were put down to a lack of support for bilingual approaches from governments.

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35 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, p. 101

36 Submission No. 2, Jilkminggan School Council, vol. 1, p. 13

37 Mrs Jillian Totham, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 257

38 Submission No. 9, Yirara College, vol. 1, pp. 76-77

39 Professor Paul Hughes, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 340

4.58 The success or failure of 'two way' approaches undoubtedly owes much to the commitment of governments. In those regions where 'two way' approaches were being backed up with teaching support and resources, such as in Kalgoorlie, they appeared to be achieving results. This support should be provided consistently. The recent Collins review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory also suggested that it would be more appropriate to refer to bilingual education as 'two way learning', as this more accurately reflects what is happening in classrooms.[40] The Committee found some ambiguity in the use of the terms 'two way' learning and bilingual education, and this issue is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. The Committee supports moves to recognise Indigenous languages in the classroom, providing this recognition is accompanied by appropriate resources and support for staff. While there will always be criticisms of vernacular instruction, the Committee recognises that it is already happening and will continue to happen. The simple fact is that it has to in many Indigenous communities, and it should not be seen as being in competition with English language instruction.

Mainstream curriculum developments

4.59 While many recommendations from previous inquiries have dealt with the need to provide a more culturally appropriate curriculum, there have also been general curriculum developments over the last ten years that have had implications for Indigenous education. Issues of access to mainstream curriculum, particularly at the secondary and higher education levels, were also raised with the Committee.

4.60 A number of the State education systems have implemented new curriculum frameworks during this period. In recent years there has been increased attention to outcomes-based learning in the curriculum. The curriculum framework currently being implemented in Western Australia, for instance, has a focus on outcomes rather than means or content. What students should achieve is specified in the framework. How they achieve it is determined by education providers. Teachers have flexibility to use culturally appropriate teaching methods with Indigenous students where these are appropriate.

4.61 Some of the advantages and disadvantages of an outcomes focus were articulated in curriculum documents provided to the Committee by the Education Department of Western Australia.

> The argument is that there is considerable social justice potential in the clear articulation of 'what's important' and the commitment to ensuring that all groups of students ... are expected to achieve at high levels on a common curriculum. ... [We] should not be prepared to accept a situation where, explicitly or implicitly, less is expected of, and offered to, certain groups of students. As these and other commentators point out, however, the dangers

40 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 125

> are considerable that what is offered as a promise to students becomes a threat or hurdle to be jumped by them.[41]

4.62 Proponents of outcomes-based education have also argued against time-based curriculum structures. These result in poor achievement for a significant proportion of students, who 'are expected to build new ideas on a progressively weaker foundation'.[42]

4.63 In the Kalgoorlie region of Western Australia, teachers were using 'both ways' teaching methodologies as part of an outcomes-based curriculum. With languages, for instance, they were recognising Aboriginal English, and were employing code-switching to move between Aboriginal English and standard English. The aim was to enhance both mainstream English literacy outcomes and learning outcomes in other areas of the curriculum.

4.64 Some writers, however, consider that an outcomes-based approach diminishes the importance of motivational, attitudinal and interpersonal factors in learning (the affective domain). The emphasis tends to be on issues of curriculum content and learning environment rather than the teacher-learner relationship or the learner as an individual. There is little emphasis on how and why students learn, which may inhibit teachers and schools in working effectively with students as individuals. In recent times, there has also been a strong emphasis on outcomes in Commonwealth funding for educational programs, particularly with regard to literacy and numeracy. The introduction of reporting measures such as national benchmarks may have some implications for curriculum content, although it is still too early to assess their effect.

4.65 Australian educators have only recently begun to move from concepts of norms and deficits to those of pluralism and diversity. The use of 'two way' approaches can be seen as part of a wider move towards a curriculum that values and builds on what students bring to the classroom, rather than seeing it as a deficit to be overcome through education. However, as some writers point out, many teachers and curricula have still not moved far in these directions.[43] The curriculum at the secondary level also remains dominated by the need to achieve outcomes that are not always appropriate to many Indigenous students (or indeed to many non-Indigenous students). The principal of Bourke High School, for example, commented on the restrictive nature of the current secondary curriculum.

> [The] big limiting factor in a secondary school is the curriculum we have, which is bound by two major exams. That sets a lot of what we can and cannot do. It is something we have been struggling with at Bourke High School now for the 18 months I have been there. With Denise Burke, who is

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41 Sue Willis and Barry Kissane, *Outcome-based Education: A Review of the Literature*, Education Department of Western Australia, Perth, WA, 1995, p. 3

42 *ibid.*, p. 25

43 National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, *Desert Schools*, SA Teaching and Curriculum Centre, University of SA, Adelaide, 1996, vol.3, p. 16

> my English head teacher, we are going through a process of completely restructuring our curriculum. Basically, we are saying that what the Board of Studies is saying we have got to teach does not suit our kids, and so we are disregarding it.[44]

4.66 Some studies of literacy development have pointed to the need to take social, cultural and environmental factors into account for all students.

> ... acquiring the intellectual capital that schools have to offer remains contingent upon children having the social capital to play the institutional game of schooling.

> The single most important issue – and it is not new – is that some children can do a lot more with words than others when they begin school, and that this gap widens rather than diminishes. Educational disadvantages and advantages already exist before children attend preschool and school.[45]

4.67 Concepts such as the hidden curriculum, which refers to the way in which the curriculum acts to reinforce existing social and economic arrangements, remain relevant in Indigenous education (as well as among the wider student population). Some witnesses also pointed to the restrictive nature of the organisation of the school year and school timetables. There were some suggestions that current holiday periods are inappropriate for Indigenous students.

4.68 An important aspect of recent curriculum design has been the emphasis on lifelong learning. Most curricula now incorporate a focus on lifelong learning, and on the skills and processes students will need to deal with social change. Questioning, decision making and the ability to think and problem solve are seen as core skills. These skills will be vitally important for Indigenous people and the Committee believes they should receive due recognition from educators.

4.69 In the higher education sector, Indigenous students have tended to choose a relatively narrow range of subjects, with most studying in the fields of arts, education, health or social work. There has been some broadening of participation in recent years. However, the areas of study remain relatively narrow in comparison to non-Indigenous students. Some institutions have introduced measures to encourage Indigenous students into other areas such as medicine. Some universities pointed to the diverse nature of the Indigenous student population as an issue universities need to deal with. James Cook University, for example, has students from both traditionally oriented communities and urban areas.[46]

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44 Mr Michael Chapman, *Hansard*, Bourke, 26 July 1999, p. 77

45 Susan Hill et al., *100 Children go to School*, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra, 1998, p. 174

46 Professor Robin McTaggart, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 152

Access

4.70 In some locations, simply getting access to a good standard of mainstream education was the main problem. This was particularly so in remote areas of the Northern Territory, where there was often only limited access to the secondary curriculum available to students in less isolated areas. One submission highlighted this situation.

> [The] majority of secondary-aged Aboriginal students living in the Northern Territory are currently not enrolled in any formal secondary education programmes, that is, in programmes which lead to recognised qualifications which in turn translate into admission into further education programmes and/or employment opportunities. ... were these students non-Aboriginal, most of them would be in secondary schools and programmes, staffed by trained secondary teachers, working to secondary curricula.[47]

> ... students who live in predominantly non-Aboriginal remote towns (eg. the predominantly White mining town of Jabiru) of a similar size to the larger Aboriginal settlements in the Northern Territory are supplied with secondary school facilities and 'proper' secondary education programmes with qualified secondary school teachers who provide a range of subjects, at least to Year 10, or JSSC level. By contrast, in CECs, secondary-aged Aboriginal students are often taught by primary-trained teachers.[48]

4.71 This submission called for a long term plan to improve access to high school education for all rural Indigenous youth in the Northern Territory. The recent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory found that poor access to quality schooling was a critical factor in poor outcomes.[49] The review recommended the development of a clear policy on increasing access to secondary education in the Northern Territory.[50] Priority three of the MCEETYA National Strategy calls for equitable access to education and training services. Evidence presented to the inquiry suggests that there is still some way to go in this area.

Recommendation 10

4.72 The Committee recommends that coordinated strategies aimed at improving access to secondary education in remote communities be investigated by an independent national consultative body on Indigenous education established by MCEETYA.

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47 Submission No. 12, Dr Christine Nicholls, vol. 1, p. 137

48 *ibid.*, p. 141

49 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 95

50 *ibid.*, p. 109

4.73 The Committee conducted an inquiry into early childhood education in 1995 and 1996[51]. Recommendations from this inquiry included that preschool programs be universally available across all states and territories[52], that the Kidmobile service be extended in remote areas[53] and that State and Territory Ministers allow greater flexibility in their childcare licensing guidelines to address the needs of small and remote communities[54].

4.74 In particular, the Committee made recommendations relevant to Indigenous communities[55], including community involvement, a holistic health and community approach to education, the continued supply of professional Indigenous educators, where appropriate the use of bilingual early childhood services and the promotion of an understanding of Indigenous culture across the school system.

4.75 During the course of this inquiry the Committee again saw firsthand these areas of need. While some improvements and successes were evident, the lack of preschool access for the majority of remote Indigenous students remains a matter of concern to the Committee.

Recommendation 11

4.76 The Committee recommends MCEETYA give renewed emphasis to the provision of pre-schools for remote communities.

Conclusion

4.77 Some of these general developments in curriculum have the potential to benefit Indigenous students. Moves towards pluralism and diversity in education are consistent with the aims of specific approaches such as 'two way' schooling. The emphasis on lifelong learning is also of potential benefit. There is general support for outcomes-focussed approaches as more educationally accountable. However, there are some concerns that these approaches need to retain an emphasis on the needs of individual students, and on the teacher-student relationship.

Indigenous studies

4.78 Priority six of the MCEETYA National Strategy calls for the teaching of Indigenous studies, cultures and languages to all students. This is a separate but related issue to that of implementing more culturally inclusive mainstream educational practices. Part of the rationale is to create a more welcoming educational environment for Indigenous students. Indigenous studies subjects are seen as essential to furthering

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51 Senate Employment, Education and training References Committee, *Childhood Matters - The report of the inquiry into early childhood education*, Canberra, 1996

52 *ibid.*, Recommendation 6, p. 65

53 *ibid.*, Recommendation 21, p. 158

54 *ibid.*, Recommendation 22, p. 165

55 *ibid.*, Recommendation 23, p. 170

the educational participation of Indigenous people, and the reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The strategy also sees a crucial role for Indigenous studies 'in the development and maintenance of culture and language'.[56]

4.79 In 1995 the National Strategy considered that the actual teaching of Indigenous studies subjects was limited. This situation appears to be improving. The Committee found that Indigenous studies subjects were being implemented in most of the locations visited, but retains some concerns over the ability of predominantly European teachers to teach these subjects. What was pleasing to note, however, was the involvement of local community members in these studies in almost all of the locations visited.

4.80 A range of programs focussing on Indigenous cultural issues have been introduced in all educational sectors. Some of these programs are aimed at the general community, some programs target professionals such as teachers who work with Indigenous people, and some are aimed at raising the cultural awareness and self worth of Indigenous people themselves. At the schools level, the subjects that are being taught include Indigenous history and culture, and language programs implemented as part of the LOTE curriculum.

4.81 One example is the Aboriginal Studies Kindergarten – Year 10 Curriculum being implemented in the Goldfields region of Western Australia. This involves 'the planning, delivery and evaluation of quality learning experiences and educational programs which aim to promote the understanding and awareness of past and present Aboriginal societies'.[57] The program is divided into four curriculum books in primary school and three curriculum units in secondary school. Each unit or book covers five themes. Planning and delivery of the curriculum involves the participation of Indigenous staff and community members, who are paid for their work by the District Office in recognition of the expertise they bring to the program.

4.82 An important result of programs and partnerships such as these has been a growth in Indigenous knowledge and cultural pride.. The Committee saw a number of instances of this. During NAIDOC week celebrations in Kalgoorlie, for instance, the Committee observed celebrations of Indigenous culture and of partnerships between the local education office and Indigenous community. At Bourke, Aboriginal students from St Ignatius Catholic Primary School who met the Committee were highly enthusiastic about the Aboriginal studies program provided to all students at their school.

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56 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996 – 2002*, Canberra, 1995, p. 61

57 Tabled documents provided by Ms Jan Pocock, Curriculum Improvement Officer, Goldfields District Education Office

4.83 Local Indigenous people were also involved in providing language training in a number of the locations visited for the inquiry. There was general support for this training, along with a recognition that there was some way to go with the development of curricula and materials. Some research in South Australia suggested that the availability of English as a second language for Aboriginal students at stage 1 and 2 of the secondary certificate had been a successful strategy.[58]

4.84 While there was evidence of successful programs in some areas, the Committee also heard other evidence that suggests that much work remains to be done. One South Australian researcher spoke of the resistance to the teaching of Indigenous studies subjects experienced by some of his former student teachers in regional areas.

> What we find is that not only do we have parents but we have prominent community members outside of the school espousing ideas that are ill-informed, which rub off on school children. When they do start to have their consciousness raised, sometimes they do not want to have their comfort zones upset.[59]

4.85 In some regions the Committee noted a clear distinction between schools that were predominantly Aboriginal and those that were not. It noted that in Brewarrina the overwhelming majority of non-Indigenous students attended the Catholic primary school in preference to the government school, which was almost wholly Indigenous. The peculiar local circumstances of this enrolment imbalance are evident in the contrast with Bourke, where Indigenous students make up a majority of enrolments at St Ignatius Primary School. The Committee is aware that this situation is by no means unusual. While there are a range of factors involved in educational choice, it indicates a level of distrust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in some locations that will take some time to overcome.

4.86 Some Indigenous studies programs are also aimed at raising the identity and self worth of Indigenous students. The Hunter Region AECG have been running a number of programs for Aboriginal students that work on developing identity through raising cultural awareness. Some of these programs have arisen out of a need for alternatives to suspension and other penalties for disruptive students. They also attempt to address mental and other health issues that may arise later in life. The programs were said to have been successful in reducing the rate of suspension among participants.[60] Other locations identified a need for similar programs. In Geraldton, there were moves to set up a diversionary program for Indigenous students at risk of suspension. Funding issues for this program were yet to be resolved at the time the Committee visited Geraldton.

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58 Mr Lester Irabinna Rigney, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 126

59 *ibid.*, p. 133

60 Submission No. 6, Hunter Region Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, vol. 1, p. 39

4.87 A number of higher education institutions have introduced courses in Indigenous studies. The University of Newcastle has been offering a Diploma of Aboriginal Studies since 1992. This is expected to become a Bachelor of Aboriginal Studies in the near future.[61] Edith Cowan University has created a school of Indigenous studies, and has introduced specific Indigenous courses into the university profile.[62] Programs in Indigenous studies have been introduced in many teacher education courses in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The past decade has also seen the development of a number of Indigenous education centres in higher education institutions, in response to one of the recommendations of the 1988 Hughes report. The Commonwealth currently funds six Indigenous Higher Education Centres through the Higher Education Innovations Programme.[63] A number of other Indigenous centres or schools of study have been established within other higher education institutions.

Vocational education and training, and adult education

4.88 Vocational education and training is rapidly taking its place in the school curriculum, although its scope and effectiveness varies widely between states and between schools. While the experience to date of Indigenous students in school based VET programs is marked by as many problems as successes, it should be noted that the outcomes of mainstream VET courses in schools have also been questioned. The undoubted success of post-school VET courses in attracting Indigenous students is detailed in chapter 7.

4.89 Vocational education and training (VET) is an area that has seen significant change in the past decade with the implementation of the Training Reform Agenda (TRA) and the introduction of VET in schools programs. The VET sector is an area of post-compulsory education that has also seen significant levels of participation by Indigenous people. The introduction of VET in schools programs, in particular, has created new opportunities for young Indigenous people to continue their education. The Committee was told of some innovative vocational programs for Indigenous school students. However, the Committee was also made aware of the limited relevance of some recent reforms in the VET sector to Indigenous people and the restrictions placed on curriculum by some of these reforms. The Commonwealth School to Work Transition for Indigenous Australians Taskforce is currently looking at aspects of the VET sector.

4.90 Some of the vocational training programs were said to have been effective in raising levels of educational participation and interest in education among Indigenous communities. On Thursday Island, for example, the high school has put a strong emphasis on vocational education. Some school subjects are linked to the Board of Secondary School Studies and some directly to TAFE courses. All the vocational

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61 Submission No. 10, Umulliko Centre, University of Newcastle vol. 1, p. 95

62 Site visit, Central West College of TAFE, Geraldton, 13 September 1999

63 Submission No. 32, Department of Education , Training and Youth Affairs, vol. 4, p. 57

programs are supported by industry placement on Thursday Island, the other islands of the Torres Strait or in Cairns. The vocational education subjects are said to be succeeding very well. While university entrance still dominates the senior curriculum, the hands-on approach of the VET sector was said to be working much better with Indigenous students. The school on Thursday Island also runs a careers market every year.[64]

4.91 Cooktown State High School provided details of a school based apprenticeship program called Step Ahead. This program does not target Aboriginal or Islander students, and goes up to year 12. It is an option that the school has been able to provide to students to give them a parallel pathway to mainstream schooling, where they can concentrate on their career and vocational skills as well as build up their literacy and numeracy skills. Step Ahead was developed out of a need to keep children longer at school.

4.92 Participants in the Step Ahead program are taken out of their classes and put in one class with a specialist, primary trained teacher. The teacher then deals with each student individually. There are generally about 12 to 15 students. The program concentrates on numeracy and literacy at the same time as looking at employment training. Each student can choose an industry in which they would like to work. The school finds a work placement in that industry and the students go to that job for one week in every month to work, but do not get paid. The absence from school was not found to be disruptive. The minimum age is 14, although students younger than that can do a work placement on the school grounds.[65]

4.93 In Kalgoorlie the Committee was told about the Commonwealth funded National Rural and Remote School to Work Project. This is a joint project with Queensland, the Northern Territory and South Australia. It aims to identify the most appropriate forms of delivery of VET in rural and remote locations. A pilot project is being implemented in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in Western Australia, and focuses on enterprise education and modified structured workplace learning. A number of innovative projects have been established in schools in the region, including a travelling disco, and clothesline production. The project will be formally evaluated in 2000 by a team from Central Queensland University.[66]

4.94 Brewarrina Central School has been running a joint secondary school-TAFE course that provides students with an introduction to TAFE subjects. One of the aims of the course is to try and attract students, particularly young boys aged 14 to 15, who would otherwise leave education. However, TAFE options in Brewarrina are limited due to lack of trained staff. One suggestion from the principal of Brewarrina Central

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64 *Hansard precis*, Thursday Island, 3 August 1999

65 Cooktown State High School, unpublished precis, *Hansard*, 2 August 1999, p. 7

66 Sue Budalich, Curriculum Improvement Officer, Goldfields District Education Office

School, was for the school and the TAFE to combine. This would allow more efficient use of staff across the two facilities.[67]

4.95 As with teacher education, a critical aspect of vocational education for Indigenous people is the ability to deliver training on-site or in the community. One submission described the delivery of vocational training in north Queensland in partnership with the mining industry. The delivery of vocational training on-site or in the community, along with concurrent delivery of literacy and numeracy training, was identified as an important factor.[68] Similar comments were made in relation to health training. There were some criticisms of 'mixed mode' forms of delivery of health training in the Northern Territory that involved periods of off-site or campus-based training for people from remote communities.[69] On-site delivery, however, can involve significant additional on-costs. These were said to be about 40 per cent in the Northern Territory as opposed to 11 per cent for staff based on campus. The 'mixed mode' approach had been adopted by the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education partly due to the costs involved in providing for students over a large geographical area.[70]

4.96 Submissions from some of the independent education providers pointed to the importance of the VET sector for Indigenous people, and the need to consider the extent to which VET sector policies took account of Indigenous needs and aspirations. The National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) has been particularly significant.[71] Some aspects of the policy reform process, such as recognition of prior learning and flexible delivery, have proved to be of benefit.[72] However, the emphasis on outcomes as determined by industry was said to be problematic given the nature of the Indigenous labour market. Improved outcomes were said to hinge as much on the willingness of mainstream industries to employ Indigenous people as on the effectiveness of VET sector programs. This was a problem in relation to funding decisions based on narrowly defined outcomes.

4.97 One submission from members of the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers described the mainstream VET system as being of only 'marginal relevance' to Aboriginal development.

> Because over 30% of those in work are on CDEP or in community employment, and because that is the major and preferred prospect for a significant proportion of those who are unemployed, and because many, perhaps most of those who are not in the workforce at all, still have a right to post-school education, for all these reasons, the mainstream VET system,

67 Ruythe Dufty, Brewarrina Central School, *Hansard*, Brewarrina, 26 July 1999, p. 20

68 Submission No. 11, Lesley Wemyss Training, vol. 1, p. 132

69 Submission No. 13, Central Australian and Barkly Aboriginal Health Workers Association, vol. 1, p. 149

70 Ms Ann David, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, pp. 243-244

71 Submission No. 17, Ms Deborah Durnan, vol. 2, p. 38

72 *ibid.*, p. 50

with its focus on training people for jobs in industry, has very little to offer.[73]

4.98 Batchelor Institute commented on some of the disadvantages of national training packages. While there were some advantages in a competency-based approach to training, they considered that the packages did not recognise competencies that were relevant to Indigenous communities. They also commented on the level of trade training in remote communities, seeing little advance in numbers in the last fifteen years. One of the major obstacles was the requirement to attend off-the-job training in mainstream institutions.[74]

4.99 The Aboriginal Education and Training Council of Western Australia commented that in many instances the significant linkage between education and training and the implications for Aboriginal employment and economic development had been overlooked in Indigenous education.[75] This issue came up on a number of occasions in relation to the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP).

4.100 One of the recommendations from the Ara Kuwaritjakutu project called for better coordination between Commonwealth and State agencies with regard to CDEP projects to ensure that works projects are undertaken by Aboriginal people with training provided.[76] This appears to be an area where only limited progress has been made. The recent Collins report in the Northern Territory called for more community involvement in school maintenance, recommending that 'community-based agencies [be] considered as the preferred maintenance providers where quality and cost-effectiveness can be assured'.[77]

4.101 Labour market issues were mentioned by the Brewarrina CDEP as one of the barriers to accessing funds for training. The CDEP had run a horticulture training program for 20 participants, 18 of whom obtained certificates, but was unable to get further funding due to the lack of full-time employment outcomes. Most of the participants returned to CDEP employment. This was said to be a particular problem with traineeships. The CDEP program was locked into a situation where it could only get continuing funding for relatively unskilled manual occupations, with little scope to provide training or improve the skill levels of participants. This is a significant dilemma in some rural and remote locations. Funds are tied to employment outcomes to avoid the charge of either 'training for training's sake' or an outcome that would see more highly skilled people engaged in low wage occupations through CDEP. However, this virtually condemns remote communities to an impoverished skills base, and all the implications this implies for community development.

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73 *ibid.*, p. 49

74 Submission No. 36, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, vol. 5, pp. 205-207

75 Submission No. 16, Aboriginal Education and Training Council of Western Australia, vol. 2, p. 15

76 Submission No. 24, Australian Education Union, vol. 2, p. 132

77 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 6

4.102 The submission from the Australian Education Union (AEU) included some case studies from a study of Indigenous VET sector participants. The case studies highlighted the difficult paths into education for many mature age Indigenous VET sector participants.

> Each of the Indigenous interviewees was engaged in vocational education and training, at least partly, for vocational reasons. The author argues strongly that, these cameos illustrate the importance of recognising benefits of outcomes in terms which go beyond the individual and an immediate job. The problems they faced were exacerbated particularly by their low skills, insufficient education and training and prior unemployment. Assistance and encouragement in coming to terms with and strengthening Indigenous identity and self esteem offered within vocational education and training providers was an important factor in the difficult road to employment.

4.103 The AEU submission also reported on work in progress for the School to Work Transition for Indigenous Australians taskforce. The submission also raised the issue of young Indigenous people who left school at an early age but were too young to enrol in TAFE.

Adult education

4.104 Adult education, also discussed in chapter seven, is an extremely important part of the educational process for many Indigenous people. The biggest increases in post-compulsory Indigenous educational attendance in recent years have been among mature age students. Many of these have been women. One witness in Alice Springs described a pattern in towns and remote communities 'of Aboriginal women having their children young and returning to learning after that time'.[78] Adult education provides an entry into the education and training system for mature age Indigenous people who may have had only limited previous educational experience.

4.105 The current demographics of the Indigenous student population indicate that adult education will remain an area of strong demand. The statistics suggest that many Indigenous people leave the education system at an early age (around 14 or 15 years of age) and return to education as adults. There may be cultural factors involved. In many Indigenous communities young people become adults at an early age and are expected to take on adult responsibilities. Education may become more important as they become older. These trends suggest that the pool of potential Indigenous adult education students will remain a large one. Indigenous adults returning to education will also continue to participate at lower academic levels than other mature age students. However, adult education remains a poor relation in the educational system. It deserves to receive greater prominence from policy makers due to its importance to the Indigenous population.

78 Ms Ann Davis, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 244

4.106 A number of submissions specifically commented on adult education. Some of the independent community-controlled institutions, in particular, attempt to cater for mature age Indigenous students returning to education after long periods of time and from very low levels of previous educational participation and achievement. They commented on the limiting effect of mainstream policy developments in adult education.[79] The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector was also the subject of two Senate reports, and the findings in relation to Indigenous education were reported in one of the submissions.[80] The ATSIC submission recommends 'that DETYA and MCEETYA give specific consideration to a national strategy to promote and implement Adult Community Education for Indigenous people'.[81]

4.107 Some evidence from adult education providers focussed on the difficulties of being an education provider for students who were coping with significant emotional and social issues. Typical of this was the comment from the Director of Tauondi College in Port Adelaide.

> We are treading that fine line between being criticised for not being wholly and solely an educational institution and acknowledging that you cannot have education of anybody, black or white, young or old, if they are not sound of mind, body and spirit.[82]

4.108 Some witnesses also called for better access to educational services and support for Indigenous adult education students. This issue was raised in particular in relation to the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS), which is no longer available for students undertaking bridging or enabling courses ('the critical groundwork for going into higher level courses').[83]

4.109 The Committee considers recent trends in Indigenous participation in vocational training and adult education to be encouraging, but is also well aware that trends in adult education in particular may well be making up for past educational failures. The Committee is concerned at the limiting effect some VET sector reforms may have on Indigenous participation and achievement. In the area of adult education, the Committee considers that the sector needs to receive more prominence in policy making because of its importance to the Indigenous community. A recommendation on adult education is included in chapter seven.

Technology

4.110 Technology has become an increasingly important subject in schools over the last decade, both as a subject in its own right and in the delivery of other subjects in

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79 Submission No. 17, Ms Deborah Durnan, vol. 2, p. 30

80 *ibid.*, pp. 50-51

81 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 119

82 Mr Bill Wilson, *Hansard*, Port Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 148

83 Ms Ann Davis, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 245

the curriculum. Witnesses in Townsville stressed the importance of learning in information technology. Some witnesses were concerned that the priorities in Indigenous education might be backward looking, with one witness arguing that information technology represented the most important part of the curriculum.

> ... yes, literacy is important but it is not the most important game in town at the moment. The most important game in town at the moment is the use of computers.[84]

4.111 The use of technology in the classroom offers considerable benefits as well as some dangers for Indigenous students. It has received only limited attention in educational policy making at the national level. The MCEETYA National Strategy identifies strategies involving the use of open learning technologies in educational delivery and the use of computer software in the development of literacy and numeracy skills. These are areas where information technology can provide significant advantages for Indigenous students. Open learning technologies, in particular, can provide greater access to educational resources for remote communities.

4.112 This was an area where educational institutions appeared to be making some progress. Most schools were placing a strong emphasis on technology, and this was particularly evident in schools with large Indigenous populations. Some witnesses claimed that computer software provided a visual and aural learning environment that was more appropriate to the learning styles of Indigenous students. Computers also had the capacity to provide instantaneous feedback.[85]

4.113 The role of technology in curriculum delivery and assessment was emphasised in the Goldfields area of Western Australia. A particular feature was the development and use of electronic portfolios. The portfolios included audio, video, digital images, computer generated tasks and traditional work samples, and provided a compact record of student achievements. This could be used in reporting to parents and Aboriginal communities, as well as to support teachers when transient students moved to another school.

4.114 One witness from Townsville saw a need for interactive computer programs that children could use when they came back into a classroom after an absence. It was considered that this would need to be developed on a national basis with support from the Commonwealth due to the cost.[86]

4.115 Some schools have developed internet sites that promote their educational philosophies and achievements. Two sites that were of particular interest were Roebourne Primary School in the North West of Western Australia, and Rawa

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84 Ms Gail Mackay, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 174

85 Tabled document from Goldfields District Education Office

86 Ms Gail Mackay, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 177

Community School in the remote Rudall River National Park (also in the north west of Western Australia). Both sites contained information and pictures of the school and students as well as examples of student work.

4.116 In the higher education sector, Open Learning Australia is involved in the development of Indigenous educational content for delivery in an on-line environment, and the application of on-line technology to foster communication and course delivery. The aim is to improve access to higher education courses for Indigenous communities.[87] The ATSIC submission recommended that DETYA fund a research project on the 'effectiveness and potential for expansion of computer aided learning for Indigenous people in remote communities'.[88] There are also a number of on-line resources providing useful information and links on Indigenous education. One example is the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Website (NATSIEW).[89]

4.117 The dangers involved in the introduction of new technology centre around access to appropriate technology and infrastructure. Information technology has become an essential area of learning for all students. Without access to appropriate technology Indigenous students could be further disadvantaged in comparison to other students. This was an area where the Committee had some concerns. In Papunya in the Northern Territory the Committee found a school with an intermittent power supply. While steps have been taken to remedy this specific instance, the Committee remains concerned that some remote locations may not be adequately equipped to provide computer facilities or training. This situation is not acceptable in this day and age.

4.118 The Committee is encouraged by the willingness of schools and teachers to adopt new technologies in the classroom, both for use in curriculum delivery and as subjects in their own right. The Committee believes this willingness should be supported by governments. It is not acceptable that schools should forfeit access to the advantages of new technology on the basis of inadequate electrical power or a lack of communications infrastructure. This is an area where governments at all levels can and should do more.

Conclusion

4.119 In examining the issue of curriculum, the Committee has identified areas of significant change over the last ten years. Many of these changes are to be welcomed. However, the Committee has also identified some areas of concern and some areas where change has been less than satisfactory.

4.120 The strongest focus of Indigenous educational policy over the last ten years has been on the attempt to implement a more culturally inclusive curriculum. The

87 Submission No. 1, Open Learning Australia, vol. 1, p. 3

88 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 119

89 http://www.natsiew.nexus.edu.au/splash2.html

Committee found evidence of significant effort in this area but is also aware that much remains to be done. The Committee was also made aware of concerns regarding both the standard of curriculum, and access to mainstream subjects in rural and remote areas. The Committee supports the use of culturally inclusive curriculum, where this is appropriate, but is concerned that this should not be at the expense of a curriculum that is both challenging and academically rigorous.

4.121 At a more general level, the Committee supports moves towards a stronger outcomes focus in education, as well as the incorporation of lifelong learning. The Committee has some concerns, however, about the effect of wider curriculum changes on Indigenous students. This is a particular concern in the VET sector. Curriculum development on the basis of labour market and industry requirements may not accurately reflect the needs of Indigenous communities. The Committee is concerned that the needs of Indigenous communities should be taken into account in changes such as these.

4.122 The Committee is particularly encouraged by the growing use of information technology, and the innovative ways in which it is being used in curriculum delivery. The biggest concern of the Committee relates to access to technology. The Committee considers that all governments need to make concerted efforts to ensure that communities have access to appropriate infrastructure and facilities. Without this access, Indigenous students will fall further behind their non-Indigenous counterparts in this important area of education.

4.123 In some areas there is much that remains to be done. Education systems have only recently begun to deal seriously with issues such as transient lifestyles and the recognition of Aboriginal English. These areas offer great educational potential as well as some risks, and will need to be handled carefully by educators. Other areas where more work still needs to be done include the on-site delivery of training, particularly in the VET sector, and an appropriate emphasis on adult education. The Committee is aware of work that is being done in these areas and recommends continued effort.

4.124 Ultimately, the quality of curriculum delivery depends on the quality and sensitivity of teachers. While curriculum developments are important, they need appropriately trained and resourced teachers. Perhaps the central message to come out of the Committees' hearings and visits is that curriculum reform (such as the introduction of 'two way' learning) will only succeed with the provision of appropriate resources and support for teachers. This requires the commitment of governments at both levels.

4.125 In conclusion, comments from a 1985 history of Australian education on the critical issues facing Indigenous education still seem relevant. These were identified as:

> ... how to develop or maintain an Aboriginal identity without jeopardising the practical values of a Western education, how to teach a bilingual program so as to provide full value to the local Aboriginal language and

culture, how to create a sufficient number of proficient Aboriginal teachers, and how to involve Aboriginal communities in contributing to curriculum development and school policy making.[90]

Recommendation 12

4.126 The Committee recommends that MCEETYA develop a coordinated consultative national approach to ensure that culturally appropriate best practice informs all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training needs.

Recommendation 13

4.127 The Committee notes the interest of ATSIC in exploring the potential for expansion of computer-aided learning for Indigenous people in remote communities and recommends that the Minister initiate a pilot project to trial the use of satellite or microwave based internet technology.

Recommendation 14

4.128 The Committee recommends that a set of national participation goals and outcomes be developed by DETYA for the education and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and that these cover the spectrum of lifelong learning with specific and designated responsibilities being allocated to the Commonwealth and to states and territories.

90 W F Connell, *Reshaping Australian Education 1960 – 1985*, ACER, Hawthorn, 1993, p. 455

CHAPTER 5

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE

5.1 Literacy is a central issue in Indigenous education. Overall levels of literacy among the Indigenous population remain well below those of other Australians. Literacy and numeracy skills were identified as crucial preconditions for achievement across all learning areas in the MCEETYA National Strategy. Priority five of the Strategy endorsed the call made in the 1994 National Review for 'a concentrated effort and a major investment in literacy development by the Commonwealth and the education providers'. The Strategy called for the provision of ESL or English language acquisition programs and teaching strategies, particularly in the early years of education. The Strategy also called for the recognition of Indigenous languages as the foundation on which to acquire 'knowledge and understanding of the English language in all its forms'.[1] Priority seven of the Strategy recognised the important role in community development of adult literacy and numeracy training, and called for increased availability of community based literacy programs.[2]

5.2 Much of the preceding discussion has touched on issues of language and literacy. This is hardly surprising given their primacy in all levels of education. The National Schools English Literacy Survey conducted in 1996 showed Indigenous students performing at lower levels of literacy than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Data from the 1996 Census also showed generally lower levels of spoken English proficiency among the Indigenous population.[3] Lack of fundamental English literacy skills has profound effects on further educational participation and achievement and was a source of major concern for many witnesses in the inquiry. As the recent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory commented, 'The wider options provided by better skills in literacy and numeracy are simply not available when Indigenous people want to exercise them'. The most significant effect was felt in relation to employment.

> For example, basic literacy and numeracy is a necessity for employment in the mining industry, which has a preferential employment program and is actively seeking to increase the number of Indigenous mining employees by providing cadetships and workplace tuition in numeracy and literacy. It has found that 'most potential employees from communities could not read occupational health and safety documents, or even signs around the

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1 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002*, Canberra, 1996, p. 51

2 *ibid.*, pp. 71-73

3 M. Gray, B. Hunter and R. G. Schwab, *A critical survey of Indigenous education outcomes, 1986-96*, CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 170/1998, Canberra, 1998, p. 14

minesite. They cannot fill in the application forms, write their date of birth or tally numbers as is required for many jobs'.[4]

5.3 Much of the evidence in the inquiry dealt with the needs of rural and remote locations. Literacy levels were generally thought to be higher in urban areas, and Census data confirmed this. Over 90 per cent of Indigenous people in major urban areas (100,000 people or more) spoke English at home. This was a higher proportion than among the non-Indigenous population, but may also mask differences in written literacy.[5]

5.4 The language and literacy needs of Indigenous communities vary widely. This can be seen in the language background of Indigenous peoples. The 1996 Census found that English was spoken at home by 80 per cent of Indigenous people. About 13 per cent spoke an Indigenous language at home. In the Northern Territory, however, 61 per cent of Indigenous people spoke an Indigenous language at home while in New South Wales less than one per cent spoke an Indigenous language at home. Just over one quarter of all people speaking an Indigenous language reported that they spoke English either not well or not at all.[6]

5.5 The Committee heard some evidence of a decline in literacy levels in some remote communities. This was purely anecdotal and hard to verify but was repeated by a number of witnesses. Contributing factors were said to include poor school attendance, health problems such as otitis media, and the lack of sufficient ESL trained teaching staff for Indigenous students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

5.6 There appears to be little evidence to support perceptions of a decline in literacy levels among the Indigenous population. Studies by both ACER and CAEPR suggest that, if anything, there has been a slight increase in literacy levels.[7] However, these levels remain low in comparison to the non-Indigenous population. Many of the anecdotal comments also related to remote areas, and they may be valid perceptions in some of these areas.

Issues and approaches in the literacy debate

5.7 Literacy is by far the most pressing issue in Indigenous education. Other concerns noted by the Committee, including health, social and family dislocation, low attendance rates and poorly trained teachers, are components of a wider pattern of factors resulting in poor literacy outcomes. Issues of pedagogy also appear as

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4 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 18

5 *ibid.*, p. 82

6 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *1996 Census of Population and Housing: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, cat. no. 2034.0, Canberra, 1998, p. 85

7 *Reading Comprehension and Numeracy among Junior Secondary School Students in Australia*, Australian Council for Educational Research, pp. 8-9

relatively minor in overall considerations of educational outcomes, except to the extent that they affect literacy achievement.

5.8 The extent of the literacy problem becomes most apparent in its effects on employment. Consideration of the role of education for employment received only limited attention in submissions and in statements made at public hearings and inspections. The Committee is concerned that a preoccupation with teaching strategies, culturally relevant curricula and other elements of classroom practice – important as these are – should not be allowed to outweigh a consideration of the principal goal of schooling, which is the inculcation of life skills, including proficiency in literacy and numeracy. The Committee is aware of varying debates over the most appropriate ways to teach these skills, but is concerned that these debates should be regarded as subordinate to the central goals of schooling.

5.9 The issue of literacy is perhaps the main issue of contention in the continuing debate over the appropriate curriculum for Indigenous children. There is general agreement in the considerable body of commentary and research literature that an homogenous program will work no better for Indigenous students than it will for other students. A high proportion of Indigenous students speak standard English and share their classrooms with fluent English speakers, but many Indigenous students speak non-standard forms of English or Indigenous languages. Communities vary greatly and this diversity needs to be reflected in approaches to literacy.

Declining English literacy?

5.10 Perceptions of a decline in English language and literacy outcomes among Indigenous school children have been well documented over recent years. A study undertaken by the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia in 1995 reported anecdotal information from experienced teachers in remote community schools supporting these perceptions. The causes of this decline were various.

5.11 One comment referred to the paucity of content in many of the lessons provided. Another referred to the easier access to money and the resultant distraction from schoolwork. There was another, more obvious, reason provided by a steady decline in school attendance, which was not so rigidly enforced as it once was. Other comments referred to the greater numbers of experienced teachers in remote area schools in earlier times. As the report summed up, the decline in literacy appeared to have its roots in social and economic changes in communities over the past ten years, as well as changes in teaching methods and community perceptions of the value of schooling.[8]

5.12 Linguists and educators interviewed for the NLLIA report who perceived a decline in English language and literacy learning in remote Central Australian schools attributed this to three sets of interrelated changes:

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8 NLLIA, *Desert Schools*, vol.2, Canberra, 1996, pp. 64-65

- changes in the historical circumstances and social environment of schools, from an earlier period of greater external control where, nevertheless, there may sometimes have been a closer relationship between teachers, students and their families, and more acceptance by students of regular attendance and engagement with learning;
- dramatic social and economic changes which have occurred in communities over the past ten to twenty years, leading to shifts in community perceptions of the value of schooling in relation to jobs and income; and
- changes in English teaching methods at the same time as there has been an increasing preponderance of inexperienced teachers with short lengths of stay in community schools, and sometimes unsatisfactory staffing ratios in those schools.[9]

5.13 Recent evidence of a decline in literacy achievement among Indigenous students in some communities comes from *Learning Lessons*, the independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory. It cites a report of interviews with the Kardu Numida Town Council in which they assess the literacy and numeracy levels of people in different age cohorts.[10] Their verdict is as follows:

> 40-60 years of age – good literacy skills, fair numeracy skills
>
> 25-40 years of age – poor literacy and numeracy skills
>
> Under 25 years of age – nil numeracy and literacy skills

5.14 As noted earlier, these perceptions, while likely to be accurate in those parts of the Northern Territory referred to, are not reflected in national data showing a slight improvement in overall levels of literacy.

5.15 The concern of Indigenous people for the teaching of English to a high level of proficiency is long-standing. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs reported in its inquiry into Indigenous languages in 1992 that virtually all the people it spoke to were adamant that they wanted their children to gain high levels of competence in standard English. This was necessary for equal access to services and employment. It meant that Indigenous people were less dependent on the wider community. The caveat was that such proficiency should not be gained at the expense of community languages.[11]

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9 *ibid.*, p. 139

10 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 117

11 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Language and Culture – A Matter of Survival: Report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance*, Canberra, 1992, p. 34

5.16 Access to and participation in preschool education was seen as vital in a number of locations. Staff from the Geraldton Aboriginal Education Centre pointed to the success of the Indigenous preschool in assisting Indigenous children at an early age. Preschool students were found to settle into school more easily and quickly, and were said to acquire skills that other children did not have in the early years of schooling. The District Education Office had identified early childhood education as a priority issue, and were doing a stocktake of children who did not attend preschool or kindergarten. The Committee notes the continuing relevance of one of the findings of a 1995 House of Representatives Select Committee inquiry:

> the major advantage of pre-school education is its potential to foster in Aboriginal children the emergence of educational and other skills that will enhance the probability of their success in subsequent stages of schooling [12]

5.17 In *100 Children go to School* a group of researchers examined literacy development in the year prior to school and the first year of school among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. The research included twenty case studies of individual children. Preschool experiences played a significant role in literacy development among these children. The research pointed to the importance of cultural factors and the home environment, and called for closer links between preschools and schools.

> This research points to the need for the preschool teacher to be placed more centrally with regard to literacy learning in the early childhood years in that much of their accumulated knowledge of children and their families could be utilised in the transition process [13]

5.18 Commonwealth financial support was being used in a number of locations to provide access to affordable, culturally appropriate preschool education for Indigenous children. Examples included the Meekawaya Preschool in Geraldton and the Gainmara Birrilee Preschool in Brewarrina. Access was much more limited for children in remote locations where the need was greatest. A mobile preschool operated in the Brewarrina region but this was able to provide only one session a fortnight in each location in comparison to the five sessions a week available in town.[14]

5.19 A number of locations commented on successful strategies they had employed to raise levels of literacy among Indigenous students. Some of these focussed on mainstream programs, although an emphasis on intensive assistance also seemed to be important. Reading Recovery was one program mentioned by the principal of Bourke High School that had produced good results with Indigenous students.

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12 Australia, House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education Report, Canberra, 1985, p. 85

13 Susan Hill et. al., *100 Children go to School*, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra, 1998, p. 12

14 Miss Natalie Fazldeen, *Hansard*, Brewarrina, 26 July 1999, p. 43

5.20 While there was a feeling in some quarters that traditional teaching methods might have some value in the acquisition of basic skills, there was only limited support for a return to these methods. There was strong support for the provision of ESL training for teachers in remote areas, and for the recognition of Aboriginal English for ESL purposes.

Bilingual education

5.21 The literacy area has tended to be dominated in recent years by debates over the value or otherwise of bilingual education. 'Bilingual education', however, has been a much-abused term. Among academics and educators it generally refers to a planned program that begins with instruction in the language of the child and involves the gradual transfer to English as the main language of instruction in the middle years of primary school. Among some community members and practitioners, however, it tends to be used synonymously with 'two way' education. Some witnesses in the inquiry used it in this way.

5.22 The debate over bilingual education should be put into some perspective. Most Indigenous people speak English as their first or only language. Bilingual education is not a serious issue for students from these backgrounds, although 'two way' education and the teaching of Indigenous languages as part of the LOTE program may be. Bilingual education is therefore a significant issue in the Northern Territory but is a relatively minor issue elsewhere in Australia.

5.23 The decision of the Northern Territory Government to phase out specific funding for bilingual education was made toward the end of the Committee's investigation, and the issue was the subject of some comment during visits and inspections in the Northern Territory. The Committee is reluctant to make any specific recommendations with regard to bilingual education. It notes the range of views from informed and experienced teaching practitioners and linguists. It also notes that Indigenous people are divided on the issue.

5.24 The Committee heard evidence from ATSIC representatives at its Canberra hearing that the removal by the Northern Territory Government of support for the bilingual program, carried through with 'minimum' consultation, represented a 'significant infringement of human rights'.[15]

5.25 This was not how Professor Paul Hughes, from the Narangga Yankuntjatjara community in South Australia, saw the issue. He informed the Committee that the first decision made by the Pitjantjatjara community on assuming control of the schools on their land in South Australia in 1992 was to abandon bilingual education. One reason was that it was not achieving results commensurate with the expenditure it required. Parents wanted schools to concentrate on teaching English as a second language and to separate the cultural domains of study, so as to include English in a Western domain. According to Hughes, there are not enough teachers in Australia who speak

15 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, pp. 142-145

both English and an Aboriginal language fluently. Nor is there an adequate body of literature in Aboriginal languages to support bilingual programs.[16]

5.26 The Committee notes adverse comment on bilingual education from other authorities. Torres Strait Islander academic, Martin Nakata, criticises the assumption that children quickly pick up a second language if they become literate in their first language. According to Nakata, this may apply well in the French-Canadian experience where both English and French are written languages, but bears little resemblance to the Torres Strait where the first language is an oral language. There are no reports in the literature, according to Nakata, of students who have undertaken a bilingual program in the Northern Territory entering university with better English language skills than Torres Strait Islander students.[17]

5.27 The Committee notes, however, that there have been positive comments on bilingual education from other sources. One case study on the bilingual program at Lajamanu School in the Northern Territory found evidence of measurable increases in levels of English language literacy and numeracy during the period in which the program was operating. In comparison to other schools with mainly Indigenous students, Lajamanu students were found to perform slightly above the average in mathematics and well above the average in literacy. Their overall performance was said to be the best of any of the Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory government school system at that time.[18]

5.28 At both Yuendumu and Papunya, in Central Australia, the Committee found a strong emphasis on instruction in Indigenous languages. The local community at Yuendumu saw literacy in the Warlpiri language as an important goal of schooling. A number of community members had undertaken teacher training and were teaching at the school. At Papunya Primary School there was a similar emphasis on instruction in Indigenous languages. The school operated a literacy centre that was engaged in producing texts in the Luritja language. The title of this report, *Katu Kalpa*, is a Luritja word used with the permission of the Papunya community. Loosely translated, it means 'Go for it' or 'Do your best'.[19]

5.29 Schools going down the path of bilingual education face a practical problem of identifying the first language of a child entering school, and of deciding which one to teach. This is relatively easy in the case of isolated communities such as Lajamanu. However, it presents problems in the Torres Strait where the first language may be either Creole or one of two traditional languages or their dialects. There is also a fear

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16 Professor Paul Hughes, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 340

17 Martin Nakata, 'Cutting a better deal for Torres Strait Islanders', *Youth Studies*, vol.14, no.4, December 1995, p. 31

18 Lee Cataldi and Gary Partington, 'Beyond Even Reasonable Doubt: Student Assessment', in Gary Partington ed., *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, Social Science Press, Katoomba, 1998, p. 330

that the transcribing of traditional languages into written form may harm the rich oral tradition of the language. An example of this problem was presented to the Committee in Alice Springs, where evidence was given by a school principal on the difficulties of learning a written form of an Indigenous language:

> ...the Arrernte language has only been put on paper in comparatively recent times. The anthropologists and the literary people have not made it a user-friendly written language. ...hearing the words and seeing the writing, it is extremely difficult to see how they are linked. This is a problem for young kids particularly who speak the language but can in no way read it. ...There would be very few people who, if you gave them a sheet of Arrernte to read, could do it.[20]

5.30 The majority of submissions to the *Learning Lessons* Review supported retention of the bilingual program, although as noted earlier this attitude was undoubtedly influenced by the manner in which the policy was announced. The report recommended shifting the focus on to 'both ways' education, involving a recognition of Indigenous languages, including Aboriginal English, and the provision of appropriate ESL support for Indigenous language speakers.

5.31 Decisions on bilingual education are largely the province of communities and educators. The Committee believes that bilingual education is one of a range of approaches that need to be considered in addressing the language needs of Indigenous communities. Bilingual education will not be appropriate in many situations. Where it is, however, and where it has the support of the community it deserves consideration.

Recommendation 15

5.32 The Committee recommends that support for bilingual education programs be maintained in those areas where they are seen as appropriate and necessary by Indigenous communities.

Aboriginal English

5.33 The recognition of Aboriginal English as a language in its own right is a relatively recent development and was touched on in a number of locations. Indigenous forms of English have developed in a wide range of areas and are frequently used as the main means of communication by many Indigenous people. The range of Aboriginal English and Kriol languages that can exist in particular areas are described in a policy document on two way learning from the Kimberley Catholic Education Office.

> Those for whom Aboriginal English or Kriol is the main language may change their speech according to the situation, sometimes speaking S.A.E. [Standard Australian English] and other times Aboriginal English or Kriol. The best way to describe this is in terms of a continuum ranging between

20 Brother Paul Gilchrist, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August, 1999, p. 268

> Kriol and S.A.E. Although the speech of Aboriginal people in areas of the Kimberley can be identified by placement on this continuum, at any given time people will change their speech to a different position on the continuum depending on the social situation at the time. For example, there is a tendency for people to speak close to the S.A.E. end of the continuum whenever they are talking with English speakers.[21]

5.34 Many of the difficulties involving the use of Aboriginal English come not so much from the differences but from the surface similarities to standard English. In the past this caused much confusion and misunderstanding between teachers and students. The prevailing view was that Aboriginal English was simply bad English that needed correcting. Recognition of Aboriginal English focusses attention on the differences and enables teachers to recognise and teach these differences. It means teaching children that there are different forms of English language usage and that these are appropriate in different social situations.

5.35 What it needs, however, is teachers who can recognise the differences between the languages and teach appropriately. In particular, it needs teachers with ESL skills, as well as a recognition of Aboriginal English for ESL purposes. In this regard, it has always been somewhat more straightforward for the relatively small population of pure Indigenous language speakers, in that it has always been easier for both students and teachers to recognise standard English as a second language. Recognition of Aboriginal English also requires the development of good teaching and curriculum resources. One example provided to the Committee by the Kimberley Catholic Education Office was *Making the Jump*, a resource book for teachers of Aboriginal students which focusses on literacy.[22] Another example provided by the Education Department of Western Australia was *Solid English*.[23]

5.36 The Committee believes that it is important to note that recognition of Aboriginal English should in no way diminish the importance of standard English in the classroom. The fact that it focusses on the differences between the languages can in fact strengthen the teaching of standard English, particularly through the use of ESL approaches. As the policy document on two way learning from the Kimberley Catholic Education Office makes clear, 'even in the early grades S.A.E. must be used and actively modelled by the teacher, so that when the later stages of literacy are reached and the subject matter becomes more difficult, S.A.E. can be used as the main medium of teaching without disadvantage to the students'.[24]

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21 Catholic Education Office, Kimberley Region, *Two Way Learning: A Guide to Policy for Kimberley Catholic Schools*, Broome, 1994, p. 6

22 Rosalind Berry and Joyce Hudson, *Making the Jump*, Catholic Education Office, Kimberley Region, Broome, 1997

23 Education Department of Western Australia, *Solid English*, Perth, 1999

24 Catholic Education Office, Kimberley Region, *Two Way Learning: A Guide to Policy for Kimberley Catholic Schools*, Broome, 1994, p. 7

5.37 The 1992 House of Representatives report on Indigenous languages expressed regret that Aboriginal English was treated as an inferior or corrupted version of English. The report argued that this attitude in schools was a significant factor in the poor academic performance of Aboriginal children.[25] In view of the clearly expressed views of parents and teachers about the importance of learning Standard English, it would seem that Aboriginal English should best be regarded in schools as a pathway or transition to Standard English. This appeared to be the approach that was being taken in those locations visited by the Committee where Aboriginal English was being used. However, the Committee heard some concerns that Aboriginal English was still not recognised for ESL purposes in some locations.

5.38 The teaching of Creole languages has been a controversial issue outside Australia, but has attracted less argument in this country. The 'Black English' issue in the United States has from time to time divided the education community in that country. Proponents of Black English in the United States saw it as an affirmation of Black culture. Its critics saw its use in schools as contributing to a form of linguistic segregation which would result in the continuing low rate of black employment in the mainstream workforce. While it is estimated that 80 per cent of African Americans use Black English to a greater or lesser extent, the use of Aboriginal English is less extensive, although it does function as a symbol of Aboriginal identity where it is used. The Committee heard no views supporting the teaching of Aboriginal English in preference to standard English, for no other reason than because standard English is the language needed to co-exist with the dominant culture.

Literacy in urban and regional areas

5.39 The Committee believes that issues such as bilingual education are less relevant to the majority of Indigenous students. It remains concerned that the needs of Indigenous students in urban areas should be addressed. Although literacy levels are higher in urban areas, they still lag behind levels for non-Indigenous students.

5.40 The Commonwealth is currently developing an Indigenous literacy and numeracy strategy but is yet to announce any details. The strategy will involve setting national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. All children will be assessed against an agreed set of performance standards. The strategy will promote successful practice across the schools sector and encourage systems to rethink teaching practice and develop more relevant curricula for Indigenous students.

5.41 The Commonwealth also funds intensive English language tuition for Indigenous language speaking students under ESL funding. This funding provides intensive tuition over a twelve month period and can also be used for professional development for teachers.

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25 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Language and Culture – A Matter of Survival: Report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance*, Canberra, 1992, p. 29

5.42 While a focus on outcomes has been welcomed in many quarters, it has been pointed out that culturally inappropriate benchmarks and assessments can be counter-productive, and that the content of instruction needs careful consideration. The Committee trusts that these considerations are taken into account in any Commonwealth strategy on literacy and numeracy.

Teaching Indigenous languages

5.43 Another area of debate is in the teaching of Indigenous languages in schools. Priority six of the MCEETYA National Strategy calls for support for the teaching of Indigenous languages to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. There is strong support for this among those who see it as an essential element in the preservation of Indigenous languages. It thus receives a great deal of support from linguists and anthropologists.

5.44 Many Indigenous parents and teachers also support the teaching of Indigenous languages in schools. Others take a different view: that preservation of the language is a family and community responsibility. One of the stated reasons for the termination of the bilingual education program in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, for example, was the belief that teaching of the language by people who were not native speakers was tending to corrupt the language.[26] As one Indigenous educator from Adelaide told the Committee, language is only one small component of Indigenous education today. The tenor of his comment suggested that not all Indigenous people believed that the role of the family needed reinforcement in the classroom.[27]

5.45 The Committee heard evidence in Adelaide of the work undertaken by Aboriginal languages curriculum officers of the South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment. A ten year program in that state has given support to the revival of Indigenous languages, although this program is dependent on the support of school communities. The choice of Indigenous languages taught as part of the Languages Other Than English (LOTE) program is determined as much by the availability of curriculum support material as it is by the residual use of a particular local language. Where local language material is not available, the attitude of the department has been that it is better to push ahead with a South Australian Aboriginal language that has materials available and ready to go.[28] However, there has been considerable work undertaken in the development of curriculum materials in recent years.

5.46 The Committee noted the benefits of including Indigenous languages in the curriculum were not easily measurable. One witness stated that the main benefit was to affirm identity and affirm partnerships between schools and communities and to empower communities. It was put to the Committee that there are advantages to

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26 *ibid.*, p. 37

27 Mr Roger Thomas, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 95

28 Mr Guy Tunstill, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 85

learning Indigenous languages in school because schools provide a different context through which learning growth can occur.[29] The Committee sees no inconsistency between the encouragement of efforts to preserve Indigenous languages and that of ensuring the best method of teaching English. It notes the understandable enthusiasm of linguists for language preservation programs, but notes also that this enthusiasm is not always shared beyond scholars of language.

5.47 At the broader level, the teaching of Indigenous languages has a role to play in language maintenance and revival, and in the promotion of greater cultural awareness among the broader community. This teaching is still very much in its infancy. Many schools have actively suppressed Indigenous languages in the past. Whether they can now do the opposite is the subject of some debate. While there will inevitably be debates over appropriateness and methods, however, the learning of Indigenous languages as part of the LOTE program can offer benefits to all students. These benefits extend beyond cultural maintenance and into the areas of cross-cultural understanding and cognitive development.

29 Mr Greg Wilson, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, pp. 88-89

CHAPTER 6

TEACHER EDUCATION

6.1 Teachers play a critical role in education, and the various Inquiries into Indigenous education over the past ten years have recognised this with a range of recommendations. Some of the critical issues identified in previous Inquiries include lack of experience, high turnover, poor recruitment practices, and poor living conditions. Indigenous education represents a significant challenge for teachers, particularly those from a European background, and demands teachers with high levels of skill and sensitivity to the needs of students. Yet, as the Committee observed, in many instances teachers in Indigenous communities are among the most inexperienced and least adequately prepared to meet the challenges of teaching in a demanding and unfamiliar environment. As one submission to the inquiry commented, 'for some their appointment to an Aboriginal community is an exile which is the price to be paid to gain a metropolitan appointment'.[1]

6.2 Previous inquiries have focussed on three main areas:

- the need to employ more Indigenous people in education and training;
- the need to improve the training and employment conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers (AIEWs); and
- the need to provide appropriate pre-service training, support and professional development for staff involved in Indigenous education.

6.3 While there has been considerable effort and some progress in these areas over the past ten years, they remain relevant. Levels of employment of Indigenous people in education and training are still low, the training and employment conditions of AIEWs remain relatively poor, and too many non-Indigenous teaching staff begin their teaching careers with little or no preparation for teaching Indigenous students. The main findings and areas of concern are summarised below.

Indigenous employment in education

> The reality is that there is and will be for a long time to come a dearth of qualified and willing Indigenous people in education and training.[2]

6.4 A common theme of inquiries into Indigenous education over the past ten years has been the need to raise the levels of employment of Indigenous people in education and training. One of the main rationales was provided in the joint policy statement on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy.

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1 Submission No. 21, Kakadu Employment, Education and Training Group, vol. 2, p. 83

2 Submission No. 23, Southbank Institute of TAFE, vol. 2, p. 115

'Aboriginal youth are ... more likely to stay on and succeed at school when they see and have contact with Aboriginal people in professional roles in the school, and are exposed to Aboriginal role models.'[3] It was also considered that greater involvement of Indigenous people in education, particularly in professional capacities, would help ensure that education was more relevant to the needs and aspirations of Indigenous people.

6.5 The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy contained two recommendations relating to Indigenous employment in education and training. Recommendations two and four jointly called for increases in the numbers employed in all levels across the schools, vocational education and higher education sectors. The policy called for early priority to be given to the development of strategies for increasing Indigenous employment in education.[4]

6.6 The earlier Hughes report was more specific, recommending commitment to a goal of 1,000 Indigenous teachers by 1990 (recommendations 26 and 38), extension of the National Scheme for the Placement of Teachers in Aboriginal Schools (recommendation 27), and increased funding for remote area teacher education (recommendation 51).[5]

6.7 The 1994 National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples found that progress in increasing Indigenous employment in education had been 'patchy'. While increases in ancillary and support staff had occurred, the number of Indigenous teaching staff was still small. There were only 572 Indigenous people employed as school teachers in the 1991 Census, representing 0.3 per cent of the teaching workforce. The Review attributed this to the limited number of Indigenous graduates who were well enough trained to compete for scarce teaching positions, and the low numbers of Indigenous students progressing through secondary and TAFE colleges and into teacher training courses. The low numbers of Indigenous teaching staff resulted in fewer role models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and compromised the cultural appropriateness of their education, while at the same time reducing opportunities for non-Indigenous students to 'communicate directly with exponents of Indigenous culture'.[6]

6.8 The Review considered that state and territory governments should provide incentives to ensure the retention of tertiary educated Indigenous Australians in the education sector, and provide employment conditions which recognised the family,

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3 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement*, Canberra, 1989, p. 13

4 *ibid.*, pp. 14-16

5 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce*, Canberra, 1988

6 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, pp. 41-42

social and cultural responsibilities of Indigenous employees.[7] The Review also stated that it was important that Indigenous graduates were given priority for job vacancies in their own communities, and that provisions were made available for Indigenous educators to upgrade their qualifications.

6.9 The Review noted that less than 0.01 per cent of post-school education staff were Indigenous, with the majority in non-teaching positions. Only twenty per cent of Indigenous teachers in the higher education sector were permanent. More than half the temporarily employed teachers were on contracts of less than a year.[8] Mentor schemes were seen as one promising avenue for the development of Indigenous academics.

6.10 The National Review recommended that all employers of Indigenous teaching staff should review existing employment arrangements for Indigenous teachers in order to ensure that their pay and conditions were comparable to their non-Indigenous counterparts (recommendation 10).[9] The Review also recommended that employers should take steps to improve the appointment and promotion processes for Indigenous teachers.

6.11 The 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody called for specialised teacher education programs, recommending that governments and educators take note of the methodology used in programs such as that of Batchelor College in the Northern Territory (recommendation 294). The Commission argued 'that continued development of such innovative and sensitive programs will substantially increase the number of Aboriginal graduates available to teach in Australian schools'.[10]

6.12 The MCEETYA national strategy reaffirmed the commitment to increase the number of Indigenous people employed in education and training (priority 2).[11] Specific strategies were outlined in each of the educational sectors, involving affirmative recruitment, formal training plans, and recognition of Indigenous cultural knowledge and skills.

Results

6.13 The issue of Indigenous employment in education, despite having been an identified priority of various strategies over the last ten years, has been bedeviled by a lack of good statistical information. The 1997 MCEETYA National Report on Schooling, for example, contained information on levels of Indigenous employment in

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7 *ibid.*, pp. 44-45

8 *ibid.*, pp. 45-46

9 *ibid.*, p. 46

10 Submission No. 10, Umulliko Centre, University of Newcastle, vol. 1, pp. 109-110

11 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996 – 2002*, DEETYA, Canberra, 1995, p. 22

just four of the eight government school systems, and no information on the non-government sector. The figures that were quoted showed some increase in employment between 1996 and 1997 but were not comparable with each other, with some of the figures failing to distinguish between professional and para-professional employment or between permanent and casual employment.

Recommendation 16

6.14 The Committee recommends to MCEETYA the development of appropriate performance indicators for monitoring the employment of Indigenous people in education.

6.15 The Committee found evidence of only marginal improvements in the level of employment of Indigenous people in qualified teaching positions. Most states have implemented strategies to lift Indigenous employment in education. However, the relative scarcity of Indigenous people with university qualifications means that Indigenous teachers are often recruited to other areas of employment. Many find employment in managerial positions within the public sector. Ironically, moves towards greater community control of Indigenous affairs may have increased the level of demand for Indigenous people with tertiary qualifications. Few Indigenous people appear to remain in the teaching profession for long periods of time, and should not be expected to do so if that is their choice. That their skills are used in other areas is not necessarily a loss to the community.

6.16 While the number of Indigenous people employed in education has been identified as a concern in various inquiries, there are some caveats that need to be recognised. The personal attributes of the teacher are also an important consideration. Simply being Indigenous does not necessarily mean greater cultural sensitivity or aptitude for teaching Indigenous people (although it might be fair to assume a greater likelihood of these attributes). The teacher induction package prepared by the Geraldton Aboriginal Education Centre used the term 'warm demander' to describe the attributes of a good teacher of Indigenous children.[12] Some evidence also suggested that some Indigenous people from rural and remote communities who left their home location to study were reluctant to return to their home location.

6.17 A number of strategies have been employed over the years to increase the level of Indigenous employment, with varying degrees of success. Tertiary institutions have targeted Indigenous students through more flexible entry requirements and more culturally appropriate teaching methods. Some of the state education departments have implemented recruitment strategies. Attempts have also been made to deliver teacher education in regional and remote locations (for example, through Remote Area Teaching Programs), avoiding the need for Indigenous people to leave their home locations in order to study.

12 http://www.wn.com.au/abled/

Teacher training

6.18 For educators, the central dilemma in this area is how to improve the supply of Indigenous teaching staff while maintaining quality. Rightly or wrongly, teacher education programs targeting Indigenous students have suffered from perceptions of poor quality among some educators and Indigenous communities. Claims of an increase in numbers at the expense of quality were described as a 'nagging criticism of all Aboriginal teacher education programs.'[13]

6.19 One approach to increasing supply has been to relax entry requirements for Indigenous students. In some instances, however, this raised concerns over the quality of graduates. This was a particular issue for remote locations and for institutions with large Indigenous populations, and was articulated by communities in some of the remote locations visited for the inquiry. It was raised on Thursday Island, for example, where it was commented that the language and numeracy criteria for selection into RATEP were low, and that there may have been some dilution of the quality of graduates in favour of quantity.[14] These communities wanted to see high teaching standards as well as culturally sensitive delivery of teaching.

6.20 Part of this dilemma involves access to higher education. Many Indigenous people access higher education through special access programs rather than year 12 completion. In 1998, for example, all of the 141 Indigenous students who enrolled in mainstream degree courses at the University of Adelaide came through special access rather than year 12 completion. Evidence to the Committee suggested that those Indigenous students who completed year 12 had better study skills and were better able to cope with university study. However, they were very much in a minority at universities.[15]

6.21 A number of universities have designed teacher training courses specifically for Indigenous students. Some of these courses target students from remote or traditionally oriented communities. The Anangu Teacher Education Program (or ANTEP) at University of South Australia is designed specifically to train Indigenous people from traditional communities in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands of northern South Australia.

6.22 Some locations have implemented programs that enable Indigenous people to undertake teacher training in their home location. In Western Australia, Edith Cowan University operates a regional centre program. This sets up in regional centres around the state for four to five years. The program is currently operating in Geraldton, in conjunction with the Central West College of TAFE, and will be offering a Bachelor of Education course that aims to increase the number of Indigenous primary school teachers in the region.

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13 Professor Robin McTaggart, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 155

14 Community members, *Hansard precis*, Thursday Island, 3 August 1999, pp. 4-5

15 Mr Roger Thomas, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 101

6.23 Batchelor Institute, in the Northern Territory, offers mixed-mode delivery of teacher training. This allows students to do a significant amount of teacher training in their home location.

> Local recruitment .. has the additional advantage that mixed mode delivery such as the Institute's obviates the requirement for students to spend consecutive semesters in the lecture rooms of tertiary institutions; and enables most to continue working as Assistant Teachers.[16]

6.24 The Committee has already referred to the possibility of delivering educational programs to remote communities via satellite-based Internet technology. Such technology also has application in remote-area teacher education as it would overcome communications difficulties which are often a problem with distance education. Community based teacher education, made possible through advanced communications technology, has the advantage of causing minimal disruption to the lives of trainee teachers would encourage the retention in remote communities of creative and dedicated young people with a commitment to the local community.

Recommendation 17

6.25 The Committee recommends that the Minister initiate a pilot project in an appropriate university for the purpose of delivering teacher education programs via satellite or microwave Internet technology to Indigenous trainee teachers in remote communities.

6.26 Remote Area Teacher Education Programs (known as RATEP) were also being offered in a number of locations. James Cook University was running an extensive program that had evolved into a more general community based teacher education program for Indigenous students. This was being run as a partnership between the university, Education Queensland, the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE and relevant Indigenous communities. Most of the education was occurring on-site, with one practical component conducted in Townsville. The students were said to be doing exactly the same subjects as those studying on campus.[17]

6.27 Evidence provided to the Committee suggested that some communities had not been satisfied with the quality of Indigenous teaching graduates from courses such as that at James Cook University. Concerns were raised, in particular, in the Torres Strait Islands as well as in other locations around Australia. It was also abundantly clear, however, that there were few Indigenous people working as qualified teachers. In some instances, Indigenous teacher education programs may be battling against community perceptions that the programs and their graduates are of lower quality.

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16 Submission No. 36, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, vol. 5, p. 209

17 Dr Frank York, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, pp. 197-198

> One of the problems that you face when you come out to these areas as an Aboriginal teacher is that a lot of people do not think. They still have these attitudes today that Aboriginal people cannot really be teachers, and that comes from the community as well as from within the system.[18]

6.28 Much of the emphasis at James Cook University was on participation. The approach included generous entry policies for Indigenous student teachers, and programs adapted and designed for Indigenous people. The University considered that the teacher education program was still in a developmental phase, and that an increased emphasis on outcomes and performance would be premature at this stage. The issue of standards was also complicated by the unique skills required to teach in Indigenous communities. For example, teachers may need to be bilingual to teach in some locations. This makes direct comparisons with the skills required to teach in mainstream locations difficult.

6.29 Staff from James Cook University were concerned that some of the perceptions of poor quality were based on isolated instances and did not accurately reflect the quality of the program. Some of these criticisms were described as 'myths'. Staff outlined the steps they had taken to ensure that their Indigenous teaching programs were of a high quality. The decision to require RATEP students to undertake a practical component in an urban school, for example, was done partly to ensure some level of moderation and standard setting. The emphasis was on producing graduates who would be fully equipped to teach in all situations, while taking into account the specific difficulties experienced by Indigenous students from remote locations and non-English speaking backgrounds.

> One of the myths was that, because these students were Indigenous and doing their pracs in community schools only, they were being pushed through out of all sorts of good intentions on the part of people to increase the number of Indigenous teachers in schools.[19]

6.30 It was also emphasised to the Committee that there was a need for strong support mechanisms within universities to assist Indigenous students to successfully complete their studies. These were generally considered to be critical in any mainstream higher education program for Indigenous students. Some witnesses considered that funding cuts over the last ten years had affected the ability of universities to provide support. 'One example of the Commonwealth cuts and state response to these cuts is at the University of South Australia, where the teacher education program is probably a third the size it was ten years ago in terms of support arrangements for incoming students.'[20]

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18 Ms Alison Salt, *Hansard*, Bourke, 26 July 1999, pp. 55-56

19 Dr Kay Martinez, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 200

20 Mr Bill Wilson, *Hansard*, Port Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 144

6.31 The evidence on teacher education points towards the importance of on-site delivery where this is possible, and flexible arrangements where it is not, to accommodate students from Indigenous backgrounds. These arrangements should not be at the expense of academic standards. Many witnesses commented that the aim of Indigenous teaching programs should be to produce graduates who are judged competent to teach in a range of situations. The Committee believes that Indigenous teacher training programs such as those at James Cook University are important initiatives and should be encouraged. The Committee is aware of the intensive nature of these courses both in terms of resources and staff input, and believes that there should be recognition of this in resource allocations. The Committee is also aware of the concerns of Indigenous communities with regard to standards. While perceptions of lower quality will almost inevitably accompany targeted programs such as those at James Cook University, the Committee believes that standards should not be allowed to suffer in any attempt to increase numbers.

Recruitment and retention

6.32 Some of the difficulties involved in raising the numbers of Indigenous teachers stem from problems in recruiting and retaining trained Indigenous teachers within education systems. The Committee became aware of some of these problems in its hearings. Few Indigenous people appeared to remain in the teaching profession for long. Many were recruited to other areas of employment within the public sector. In South Australia, the Committee was told that targeting of Indigenous students by universities had been successful in raising the numbers of Indigenous teaching graduates, but that few of these graduates had gone on to take up teaching appointments. The isolated location of many new teaching positions and the opportunity for alternative employment in the public sector were said to be factors involved in this outcome.

6.33 Other problems included a lack of good support networks in a predominantly European workforce. One submission from the vocational education and training sector saw a role for supportive 'white fellas' due to the need for Indigenous people to live in two worlds.[21] Some of these difficulties were outlined to the Committee by an Indigenous teacher in Bourke.

> There needs to be some sort of support mechanism set up for Aboriginal teachers. We are few and far between; there are not many of us around. There are only four in this whole district, and there is no networking between us. The fact that we are in the lower positions means that it is a little bit difficult in terms of accepting sometimes what schools do from an Aboriginal perspective, especially in schools with a high population of Aboriginal students.[22]

21 Submission No. 23, Southbank Institute of TAFE, vol. 2, p. 115

22 Ms Alison Salt, *Hansard*, Bourke, 26 July 1999, p. 55

6.34 Cultural issues and conflict within Indigenous communities could also impact on the willingness of Indigenous teachers to remain in the teaching workforce. The complex cultural groupings in some remote communities, as well as the need to take into account cultural issues such as avoidance relationships, could put Indigenous teachers in potentially difficult situations.

6.35 Some education departments and institutions have implemented recruitment strategies for Indigenous teachers. The University of Newcastle, for instance, has an Indigenous employment strategy that aims for a 2 per cent employment level of Indigenous staff across the university's employment categories.[23]

6.36 The provision of incentives to encourage Indigenous people to remain longer in the teaching profession, and the use of programs to allow Indigenous people employed as education workers to upgrade to teaching qualifications could also be used. There were a range of opinions on the effectiveness and practicality of these strategies.

> One way of obtaining quality staff who remain for longer periods in remote communities is through careful structuring of incentives which result in remote area positions being of higher professional status than urban positions, i.e. a situation wherein everyone knows only 'good staff' get remote area positions. Another strategy is local recruitment, which has long been recognised as one of the influences on turnover.[24]

6.37 One option for increasing the numbers of Indigenous teachers could be the introduction (or reintroduction) of teaching scholarships. This would involve a bonding arrangement whereby recipients would be required to remain in the profession for a certain period in return for free tuition. Some witnesses saw some merit in this idea, particularly in relation to the costs of obtaining a qualification. The perceived financial disincentives to obtaining tertiary qualifications were cited as one of the factors contributing to lower numbers of Indigenous teaching students. The example of medical scholarships, which were being offered by some of the state and territory governments, was given as one instance of a successful approach to increasing employment in certain professions. Scholarships were also seen as one way of overcoming Indigenous peoples' unease about HECS.[25]

Recommendation 18

6.38 The Committee recommends that MCEETYA review incentives to attract and retain experienced teachers in remote areas and in schools with a large proportion of Indigenous students, and to consider the introduction of remote area teaching scholarships.

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23 Submission No. 10, Umulliko Centre, University of Newcastle, vol. 1, p. 90

24 Submission No. 36, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, vol. 5, p. 209

25 Mr Roger Thomas, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 105

6.39 Another potential strategy for increasing the numbers of Indigenous teachers is the recruitment of Indigenous teachers to a national teaching service (such as the old Commonwealth Teaching Service). The 1994 National Review expressed caution at calls for an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching service directly funded by the Commonwealth. This was felt to be impractical given the predominant role of the state and territory education systems in delivering and funding primary and secondary education, and the potential difficulties in integrating such a service with the state and territory education systems.[26]

6.40 The MCEETYA National Strategy calls for affirmative action, just and equitable salary and working conditions, and formal training plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the various education sectors. Most state and territory education departments have been implementing recruitment and professional development strategies for Indigenous employees. To date, however, there is little conclusive evidence regarding the effectiveness of these strategies.

6.41 The Committee commends efforts to target Indigenous students in teacher training programs and believes they should be maintained. Lack of success in retaining graduates in education should not be allowed to discourage efforts in this area. As was made clear to the Committee, many of these graduates acquire skills that are put to use for the benefit of their communities in other ways. However, the Committee believes that more could be done in the area of recruiting and retaining Indigenous teachers. Scholarship programs have been successful in increasing employment levels in other areas such as health and should be considered for teaching, particularly in view of the financial commitments involved in undertaking tertiary study. Strong support systems for Indigenous teachers, involving an opportunity for networking with teachers in similar positions and good professional development programs, should also be made a priority in all education systems.

Caveat

6.42 While the overall numbers of Indigenous people in higher education are low, teaching is one of the areas of study in which they have relatively strong participation. There have been some concerns in fact that Indigenous people tend to study a relatively narrow range of subjects in higher education, and some attempts to increase the numbers in areas such as medicine. Although it would be desirable to increase the numbers studying education, this should be aimed for in the context of increasing the numbers overall. There may also be a need to be realistic about what can be expected of the relatively small number of Indigenous higher education students given the competing demands on them.

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26 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, p. 47

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers[27]

6.43 There has been significant progress over the past decade in the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) in the schools sector. In 1994 there were almost 1,700 people employed as AIEWs in education systems in Australia.[28] In many areas, the employment of AIEWs appeared to be compensating for lack of progress in the employment of Indigenous teachers. While there were few Indigenous teachers in the schools visited for the inquiry, most of these schools had a number of AIEWs. Their role included the provision of support and assistance to classroom teachers, counseling Indigenous students and parents, and liaising between home, school and the community.

Opinions

6.44 The Committee heard on numerous occasions that Indigenous education workers were regarded highly by other staff. They were said to provide a positive role model for students. In most instances, the Indigenous education workers came from the local community and were able to provide an important link between schools and the community. They also brought to the school environment an understanding of Indigenous cultural issues and values that was of benefit to both students and staff. Indigenous education workers also provided an important source of continuity for parents and students, particularly in remote locations where it was unrealistic to expect young teachers from predominantly urban backgrounds to commit for extended periods of time.

6.45 The National Review found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers provided positive role models for all students.

> ... there was almost universal praise for the important and positive benefits that their employment brings to the educational experiences of Indigenous students.[29]

6.46 The Ara Kuwaritjakutu project examined the working conditions of AIEWs. The project was undertaken by the Australian Education Union, with principal funding from the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training. The project report documented some of the benefits of AIEWs. They were commonly the largest body of education staff who consistently worked with Indigenous students for long periods of time, were generally recruited locally, were knowledgeable about the

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27 Also known as Aboriginal Teacher Aides, Assistant Teachers, Koorie Educators, Community Teachers, Aboriginal Literacy Workers, and Home School Liaison Officers.

28 Pat Buckskin and Bill Hignett, *Ara Kuwaritjakutu Project: Towards a New Way*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra, 1994, p. 35

29 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, p. 50.

local Indigenous community and culture, and were insightful about the problems facing Indigenous children.[30]

Pay and conditions

6.47 In discussions with the Committee, the main concerns raised in regard to Indigenous education workers related to pay and conditions. Most Indigenous education workers considered that the level of pay was insufficient to attract and retain good staff. They also felt that the career paths were relatively limited. These comments were backed up by evidence from staff at more senior levels, including regional directors from some of the state education departments.

6.48 The submission from the Australian Education Union argued that many Indigenous education workers were 'still employed in temporary positions with no guaranteed funding to protect employment and salary scales which take little account of the demands of the job'. The submission endorsed the concerns of AIEWs, arguing that 'the precarious employment of AIEWs is detrimental to the profession'. The submission supported the recommendations of the Ara Kuwaritjakutu project regarding employment stability and access to training and career paths for AIEWs.[31]

6.49 The 1994 National Review recommended a review of pay and working arrangements and the establishment of awards for Indigenous education workers to better reflect their role in assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in education. The Review saw the development of awards as a way of combating high turnover, facilitating a shift from temporary to permanent employment, avoiding the use of AESIP funds for AIEWs, improving salary levels, providing a national definition of roles, rights and responsibilities, and providing better opportunities for professional development.[32] The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody also included recommendations concerning recognition and better remuneration for AIEWs.

6.50 The Ara Kuwaritjakutu project reported that the average salary level for an AIEW in 1994 was $18,590.[33] In some areas there appeared to have been little movement in salary levels. In Geraldton, the Committee spoke to a number of AIEWs who raised issues relating to pay and conditions. Their annual salaries were said to be around the $19,000 mark. The Ara Kuwaritjakutu project reported that AIEWs with tertiary qualifications were among the most poorly paid graduates in Australia. The project found a high level of staff turnover, poorly defined roles, low salary levels, a lack of access to permanent employment and related entitlements, limited

30 Pat Buckskin and Bill Hignett, *Ara Kuwaritjakutu Project: Towards a New Way*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra, 1994, p. 6

31 Submission No. 24, Australian Education Union, vol. 2, pp. 163-166

32 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, p. 52

33 Pat Buckskin and Bill Hignett, *Ara Kuwaritjakutu Project: Towards a New Way*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra, 1994, p. 43

opportunities for training and development, and some evidence of institutionalised racism. The project recommended that the Commonwealth Government initiate action for the development of a national award or framework for the employment of AIEWs.[34]

6.51 Some witnesses commented on difficulties in accessing training opportunities. Two AIEWs at the Geraldton Secondary College were interested in furthering their training through Edith Cowan University, which was offering teacher training in Geraldton as part of its regional centres program, but were prevented from doing so by financial factors. The money that would be available to them if they went into full-time study for four years was not sufficient for them to support themselves and their families. A better arrangement, which was in place five or six years ago, was when AIEWs could study for two or three days and work as well.[35]

6.52 The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) has been piloting a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker Traineeship. Some of the results of the pilot were reported in a recent DETYA publication.[36]

6.53 Other concerns included the ambiguous nature of the role taken on by Indigenous education workers, and the level of training. Most Indigenous education workers considered that they were required to be more than just education workers. In many cases, they also needed to be counselors to both students and parents. Many had become AIEWs with little formal training and acquired most of their skills on the job. They expressed a desire to upgrade their qualifications but considered that family commitments, time constraints and financial issues limited their capacity to do so.

6.54 Research into year 12 completion in South Australia examined some of the school factors affecting Indigenous educational performance. This research found that Indigenous education workers were important in the lower levels of secondary schooling but had a limited role in the final years (years 11 and 12). This research also found a level of confusion over the role of Indigenous education workers among teachers, students and parents.[37]

6.55 The submission from ATSIC also spoke of the ambiguous role taken on by Indigenous education workers. Research quoted in the ATSIC submission suggested that there was a need for more Indigenous education workers in secondary schools.

> There is a concern by AEWs that in their relationship with students they have to achieve a balance between providing support and requesting

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34 *ibid.*, p. 10

35 Site visit, Geraldton Secondary College, 13 September 1999

36 John Henry et. al., *Developing Best Practice with Indigenous New Apprenticeships*, REB Report 3/99, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra, 1999

37 Mr Lester Irabinna Rigney, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 124

students to abide by school rules. Many AEWs feel a sense of conflict between what they were trying to achieve and the positions taken by their schools as well as feeling let down by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents.[38]

6.56 AIEWs were generally found to lack appropriate career paths and were often poorly paid. Some areas have been developing training programs to allow AIEWs to upgrade their qualifications. These need to be supported. The working conditions of AIEWs also need to be looked into. At the general level, little appears to have changed since the 1994 Review. AIEWs remain relatively poorly paid, and have little training and limited career paths. This is not acceptable given the important role they play in Indigenous education. A system that relies on the goodwill and enthusiasm of poorly paid and untrained staff is ultimately not supportable. The Committee sees the ranks of AIEWs as a potential source of skilled and dedicated professional teachers.

Recommendation 19

6.57 The Committee recommends that MCEETYA implement a strategy that provides an appropriate career and salary structure for AIEWs in all the states and territories and that provides for consistency in pay and conditions across the states and territories. It further recommends that AIEWs be given incentives to gain full teaching qualifications.

Strategies

6.58 The Committee considers that AIEWs are an essential part of the education system for Indigenous people and should be supported. The fact that most AIEWs come from the local community is one of the strengths of the scheme. This has allowed the involvement in education of people with strong local knowledge and connections.

6.59 Consideration should be given to the implementation of strategies that would allow Indigenous education workers to remain in schools and have the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications. One suggested option was the introduction of a para-professional level between AIEWs and teachers. This would allow Indigenous education workers to further upgrade their qualifications, and would provide a valuable opportunity for career progression.

6.60 Anecdotal evidence was cited in the submission from the South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Council on the value of AIEWs and Aboriginal Education Resource Teachers (AERTs).[39] According to this submission, appropriate status, tenure and salary structures for AIEWs had recently been implemented in South Australia. The Department of Education, Training and Youth

38 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol 5, p. 135

39 Submission No. 31, South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Council, vol. 4, p. 9

Affairs has also been involved in trialing an AIEW Traineeship program.[40] While these are important initiatives, it is worth noting that the 1994 Ara Kuwaritjakutu project found evidence of similar initiatives.[41] Little progress will be achieved without a strong commitment on the part of governments to follow through on these initiatives.

Teacher Preparation and Development

6.61 The central dilemma in teacher preparation is how to adequately prepare teachers from predominantly mainstream European backgrounds to teach Indigenous students from a range of backgrounds. Demographics alone make it clear that the vast majority of teachers who face a classroom of Indigenous students in any proportion will be non-Indigenous. Appropriate pre-service training, support and professional development for teachers are therefore crucial issues.

6.62 One educator with considerable experience as a principal in central Australia described the situation she frequently encountered with new teachers.

> In many instances I had young non-Indigenous teachers arrive who had never actually met an Aboriginal person before in their life, who then went to live in a community which was 99 per cent Aboriginal people.[42]

6.63 It also needs to be recognised that there are many enthusiastic, competent and committed teachers working in Indigenous education. The progress that has been achieved over the past decade in raising participation and retention rates, and in developing more culturally relevant curricula and teaching materials, owes much to the work of these teachers. There have also been significant increases in the level of acknowledgment of Indigenous issues in teacher education, as well as more general changes in teaching practice. These developments have been reflected in the pre-service education of teachers.

Teacher training

6.64 The Committee believes that the level of preparation of young teachers for teaching Indigenous students is demonstrably inadequate. Most educational institutions include some cultural awareness training for teachers. However, these programs are frequently electives rather than core units. There is evidence of some reluctance to take elective units in Indigenous education by students who fear being sent to remote locations. One witness in Townsville commented, 'if it is offered as an elective, a lot of young white teachers do not do it because they do not want to be sent to a remote Aboriginal community'.[43] Such provision can only be regarded as ad hoc

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40 Submission No. 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, vol. 4, p. 59

41 Pat Buckskin and Bill Hignett, *Ara Kuwaritjakutu Project: Towards a New Way*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra, 1994, p. 21

42 Dr Christine Nicholls, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 103

43 Mr John Scott, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 188

at best. The Committee is of the opinion that teacher education units in Indigenous studies should be core units rather than electives, due to the high probability of teaching Indigenous students in the early stages of a teaching career.

6.65 The 1994 National Review stressed the importance of promoting cultural sensitivity through teacher training as a means of furthering reconciliation.[44] The Review recommended that higher education institutions running teacher education courses and employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators implement the recommendations of the report *Teacher Education Pre-service: Preparing Teachers to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students*.[45] This report was produced in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Its main aim was to assess the preparation of teachers to fulfil the requirements of recommendation 290: 'that Aboriginal viewpoints, interests, perceptions and expectations are reflected in curricula, teaching and administration of schools'.[46] It also addressed recommendation 295, which called for teacher training courses to include units in Indigenous history and culture.

6.66 The *Teacher Education Pre-service* report found what it described as a 'smorgasbord approach' to teacher preparation in Indigenous education, with no consistency of provision.[47] There was widespread support in the literature for compulsory Indigenous education subjects in teacher preservice courses. While there was general support for this among universities, however, there were some concerns over the need to maintain autonomy. Universities considered that they needed to retain some level of flexibility and control over the design of courses in order to reflect student and university needs. The report outlined a total of 22 recommendations but stopped short of recommending compulsory units in Indigenous education. The report called instead for institutions involved in teacher education to identify strategies to fulfil recommendations 290 and 295 of the Royal Commission, and to incorporate higher levels of Indigenous content in teacher training courses.

6.67 One of the persistent themes in this area has been the need for Indigenous studies as a compulsory component in teacher training courses. Much of the evidence to the Committee suggested that this was still not happening. Provision of pre-service training in Indigenous education appeared to be haphazard. Some institutions include mandatory units on Indigenous education and cultural awareness. In others, these units are electives. There was a suggestion that the fact that Indigenous studies courses were optional at some institutions meant that students were deterred from doing them

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44 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Canberra, 1995, p. 43

45 A report prepared for the then Department of Employment, Education and Training by the Aboriginal Research Institute at the University of SA in 1994

46 Eleanor Bourke et. al., *Teacher Education Pre-service: Preparing Teachers to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra, 1993, p. 3

47 *ibid.*, p. 1

because they might be posted to a remote area. A number of submissions called for Indigenous studies to be made mandatory in teacher education courses.

6.68 A commitment to compulsory units in Indigenous education is not a guarantee of adequate preparation to teach Indigenous students. Courses in Indigenous education can run the risk of being tokenistic. More frequently, such courses have to compete with the other demands placed on student teachers. These problems were outlined to the Committee by a lecturer from Flinders University in Adelaide. The University includes a compulsory 13 week unit in Indigenous education as part of its teacher training course. This was described as 'a hitchhikers guide to Indigenous peoples'.

> In my case, at Flinders University, Indigenous education is only a very small part of their total degree. The topic that I teach within teaching Indigenous Australian children is the last topic student teachers do before they graduate. So we do not get any topics in the first, second and third years. At the fundamental level they are trying to grasp how to master their careers. In the tool kit, in the second and third years, we have no section there to prepare them for teaching Indigenous kids, let alone teaching traditional, or those kids within the interior from the Aboriginal communities of our country. I think that first in higher education is resources and second is that teaching degrees have already been established. So Indigenous education has been tacked on to the end. It only exists at the fringe of a degree because there is so much to cram within a degree.[48]

6.69 While the underlying educational question could be whether Indigenous people are better served by courses that concentrate on the fundamentals of good teaching or those that provide an insight into Indigenous educational issues, the two aims are not incompatible. Indigenous education requires good teaching, and any insights gained from a more rigorous consideration of Indigenous educational issues would undoubtedly be of benefit in the wider educational arena.

6.70 Some evidence was quite critical of the role of universities in teacher education.

> Aboriginal education is not regarded as the specialisation it really is. Inter-cultural schooling is a complex task. Inter-cultural teachers must study Aboriginal anthropology, Aboriginal linguistics and Australian history. The present teacher education degrees are almost devoid of any content studies and are dominated by psychology, teaching theory and curriculum studies. One unit of Aboriginal education may affect the attitudes of the teaching profession, but actual teachers of Aboriginal students should be required to undertake further studies in anthropology and linguistics.[49]

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48 Mr Lester Irabinna Rigney, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 129

49 Submission No. 7, Mr Peter Reynolds, , vol. 1, p. 55

6.71 Other evidence was more supportive, describing the work of some of the universities as 'outstanding'.[50] Some evidence also suggested that funding cuts in the higher education sector had adversely affected the quality of teacher education programs, and the ability of programs to incorporate Indigenous education units. One witness commented that 'one example of the Commonwealth cuts and state response to those cuts is at the University of South Australia where the teacher education program is probably a third the size it was ten years ago in terms of support arrangements for incoming students'.[51] The Queensland Teachers Union in their submission commended the recommendations of the Yatha conference held in Brisbane in 1993. The conference addressed issues of teacher education and recommended that all pre-service teacher education programs should include Indigenous studies subjects.[52]

6.72 A number of state education departments have been undertaking reviews of teacher training. These were referred to in evidence in Canberra from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Departmental representatives commented that the Commonwealth has been urging that the issue of adequate preparation for teachers of Indigenous people be addressed in any review, and that the employers of teachers impress this issue on universities.[53]

6.73 Teacher preparation has also been affected by more general trends within teaching theory and practice. Of most significance in Indigenous education has been the move away from 'deficit models' of educational disadvantage. These approaches saw Indigenous people as disadvantaged due to cultural and socio-economic circumstances, and posed a remedial rather than a developmental role for education. Poor performance was seen in terms of inadequacies in the students and their home situation. The purpose of education was to overcome educational 'deficits' through compensatory input. More recent theory has seen education as a process of interaction between students and teachers, with the prior learning and skills of students recognised as an important aspect of this interaction.[54] These moves parallel developments in Indigenous education such as 'two-way' schooling, in which the cultural and linguistic background of the student forms an important part of the learning process.

6.74 The Committee believes that it is important that teachers should receive adequate preparation for teaching Indigenous students. The Committee considers that this preparation should be comprehensive and academically rigorous. Units in Indigenous education should be made mandatory in teacher education courses. The MCEETYA National Strategy has called for negotiation with universities and other

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50 Mr Roger Thomas, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 100

51 Mr Bill Wilson, *Hansard*, Port Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 144

52 Submission No. 22, Queensland Teachers Union, vol. 2, p. 97

53 Mr Tony Greer, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 303

54 See, for example, *Desert Schools, 1996*, vol. 3, pp. 12-17

teacher training institutions to ensure that all teaching graduates complete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies as part of their pre-service training. The strategy also called on other educational institutions to ensure that all lecturers had completed such studies.[55] The Committee endorses this call but considers that progress in this area has been too slow. Departments of education are the principal employers of teaching graduates and should not be reluctant to 'call the shots'. The Committee believes that urgent attention should be given to this aspect of the MCEETYA National Strategy, including the development of appropriate performance measures to monitor progress.

Recruitment and retention

6.75 While there is much that could be done to improve the pre-service training of teachers, there may be some delays in any training actually resulting in improved classroom practice. In one location the Committee was informed that primary school teachers who were currently eligible for permanent employment within the state teaching service were those who had graduated in 1993. More recent graduates could be obtained only on a casual basis.

> People that have finished university six years ago may then get a job. They are not up to speed in relation to current curriculum. Some may not have taught. Then they decide to utilise their tertiary qualifications and may get Bourke or Wanaaring or an isolated remote school out this way.[56]

6.76 The implication is that any improvements in teacher training may take some time to filter through to classroom practice. A case could be made for accelerated access to permanent employment for those teachers undertaking Indigenous studies and prepared to teach in remote or difficult to staff locations.

6.77 High staff turnover also regularly affects schools in regional areas. Typical of this was the situation described to the Committee at Brewarrina Central School, a school with a predominantly Indigenous population.

> ... in 1998, out of the twenty three [teaching] staff we had, nineteen were new and, of that nineteen, eleven were beginning teachers.[57]

6.78 Greater incentives for teachers working in remote communities could be used to encourage experienced teachers to take up appointments and to reduce the high level of staff turnover. The Committee heard of instances where the majority of teachers in schools had been replaced in a single year. While it is unrealistic to expect many young teachers to commit to extended periods of time in remote locations, the Committee believes more could be done to avoid unnecessarily high turnover, and

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55 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996 – 2002*, DEETYA, Canberra, 1995, pp. 40-50

56 Mr Paul Loxley, *Hansard*, Bourke, 26 July 1999, p. 58

57 Ms Ruythe Dufty, *Hansard*, Brewarrina, 26 July 1999, p. 9

high levels of turnover in particular years. The Remote Teaching Service in Western Australia was one example of a recruitment and incentive scheme for teachers in remote locations. The scheme provides financial and other incentives to teachers who take up appointments of three or more years in remote schools, and was said to have been relatively successful in reducing levels of turnover.

6.79 There is also a need for better support for teachers working in remote locations. Better housing and infrastructure are crucial. The Committee acknowledges the efforts made by some of the state and territory education systems. However, the Committee sees a need for continuing effort in this area. One submission was critical of the failure of education departments to provide secure housing in remote communities, pointing to instances in which teachers had been assaulted.[58]

6.80 The Committee also heard of examples of inflexible recruitment practices that led to teaching vacancies in remote areas going unfilled. Dr Christine Nicholls, a former principal from central Australia, gave examples of positions that had remained unfilled for up to twelve months in spite of the availability of suitable applicants. Dr Nicholls was unable to attribute any reasons for the vacancies remaining unfilled but commented that 'the entire time I was principal of Lajamanu school, we did not have our establishment staff on deck'.[59]

6.81 The situation of secondary aged students being taught by primary trained teachers in some remote locations was described by some witnesses. One submission commented on the need for an appropriate ratio of teachers with English as a Second Language skills (a maximum of one teacher to ten students).[60] A persistent problem for educators is that those schools with the greatest need for this intensive level of assistance are those that are in the most remote locations and are the hardest to service. It is often not realistic to expect young teachers to commit to long periods of time in remote locations far from family and friends. Some locations such as Geraldton and Kalgoorlie were experiencing problems recruiting staff and, in some instances, considered that the quality of teachers had suffered. There were also some instances where teachers had been recruited from inter-state or overseas.

6.82 The Committee commends the efforts of some education systems to implement recruitment practices that recognise both the unique skills and difficulties involved in teaching Indigenous students, particularly in remote communities. The Committee also commends the efforts of those teachers who service these communities. However, the Committee is concerned that too many Indigenous communities continue to be served by inexperienced teachers with little or no preparation for Indigenous education. While pre-service education is the responsibility of universities, education departments as the main employers of teachers can influence the content of teacher education courses. Giving due recognition to Indigenous

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58 Submission No. 21, Kakadu Employment, Education and Training Group, vol. 2, p. 84

59 Dr Christine Nicholls, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 102

60 Submission No. 12, Dr Christine Nicholls, vol. 1, p. 141

education studies as part of the recruitment process should be a priority. The Committee also notes the comment from some witnesses that Indigenous communities often need teachers with specialist skills such as English as a Second Language (ESL) training. (ESL issues are covered in more detail in the curriculum chapter.) The Committee believes these needs should be reflected in recruitment practices. The Committee also supports the use of incentive schemes such as the Remote Teaching Service in Western Australia and recommends their adoption in other states and territories.

Recommendation 20

6.83 The Committee recommends that MCEETYA look at ways of improving incentives to encourage experienced and accomplished teachers to accept appointments in schools with a high proportion of Indigenous students, and especially in remote areas.

Teacher induction and professional development

6.84 As previously noted, any improvements in teacher training may take some time to filter through to classroom practice. While strategies such as those outlined above can be put in place to improve the recruitment of teachers with appropriate training, the majority of teachers of Indigenous children in more populous regions will continue to be those teachers who graduated some time ago. This simple fact underlines the importance of good, continuing professional development.

6.85 There was a great need identified by the inquiry for better and more comprehensive teacher induction and in-service training. Some examples of good practice were provided to the Committee. The South Australian Education Department has a category of designated Aboriginal schools for those schools with high Aboriginal populations. Staff who are appointed to these schools have to do an orientation and undertake programs on cultural awareness and language diversity. In Western Australia, the state education department has developed an induction package that is used for teachers who will be teaching large numbers of Indigenous students. Teachers in remote schools in the Goldfields region are provided with a three day induction program prior to commencing, and with further support during the year.[61]

6.86 DETYA representatives informed the Committee that the Commonwealth has been attempting to monitor the quality of teacher induction. Through the IESIP program, the Commonwealth has been seeking information on the length and comprehensiveness of induction programs (for example, whether it is just a one day program or a three week program involving community visits prior to placement).[62] The professional development indicator in IESIP agreements is one way of

61 Site visit, Goldfields District Education Office

62 Mr Peter Buckskin, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 304

maintaining pressure on state and territory jurisdictions to improve levels of teacher preparation.

6.87 In practice, however, even with induction and in-service training most young teachers from middle-class European backgrounds will experience difficulties adapting to life in Indigenous communities. As was put to the Committee in one location, most young teachers spend the first six months trying to survive. In-service training during this period was generally wasted, and the emphasis was on more basic forms of assistance.[63]

6.88 In the longer term, in-service teacher education and cultural awareness training are issues for both experienced and inexperienced teachers alike. The Committee was told informally of cases of experienced teachers, including headmasters, with barely concealed racist attitudes. There had been some resistance by these staff to undertaking cultural awareness training, with some staff required to undertake training through performance agreements.

6.89 Many educators working with Aboriginal people today remain the product of education in cultural deficit theories about Indigenous people. These educators need to be kept informed of changes in educational theory and practice, particularly as they affect Indigenous people. Some studies have also pointed to the differing understandings and expectations of teachers and Indigenous people. Few teachers have any knowledge or understanding of the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people. One submission pointed to the role of education in community development and the need for teachers to be involved.

> ... teaching should be seen within the context of community development and advancement. Teachers of Aboriginal students must be seen as community development officers and their professional preparation planned accordingly.[64]

6.90 Aboriginal parents, on the other hand, have little contact with their children's education, understand little about what they are studying or why attending school and doing homework could be essential, and lack information on assessment processes.[65]

6.91 The in-service needs of teachers in large urban or regional educational institutions teaching a range of students can be quite different to those teaching in remote, predominantly Aboriginal communities. It needs to be remembered that significant proportions of the Indigenous student population attend large urban or regional institutions, where they might form perhaps ten per cent or less of the student population.

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63 Goldfields District Education Office, *Hansard Precis*, 14 September 1999, p. 7

64 Submission No. 7, Mr Peter Reynolds, , vol. 1, p. 55

65 NLLIA, *Desert School*, vol 3, Canberra 1996, pp. 14-15

6.92 In-service education and professional development for teachers is an area where the Commonwealth has had some involvement. The Quality Teaching Program is a recent Commonwealth initiative that will provide funding of $77.7 million over a three year period for targeted professional development. DETYA representatives informed the Committee that the Minister had indicated that teachers of Indigenous people would be one of the targets for the new program.[66] The Commonwealth has previously funded a national professional development scheme that was found to be successful in providing additional assistance to teachers.

6.93 Many witnesses were of the opinion that English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching should form a significant part of the professional development of teachers with Indigenous students (as it does for teachers with students from other non-English speaking backgrounds). While Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander Creole are recognised for ESL purposes, there was some uncertainty over the extent to which Aboriginal English is recognised. The Indigenous languages component of the Commonwealth funded ESL program can provide some funding for professional development, although its main focus is on assistance to students.

General trends

6.94 As in other areas, there are more general developments in teacher supply and quality that have the potential to adversely affect the quality of education for Indigenous Australians. A number of recent studies have suggested that there may be teacher shortages in some areas of secondary education in the future.[67] Any consideration of issues involving the quality and nature of the teaching workforce should take account of more general trends to ensure that Indigenous Australians are not disadvantaged still further.

Conclusion

6.95 The various processes put in place under the NATSIEP appear to have been only partially successful in improving the employment of Indigenous people in education, or the levels of preparation of non-Indigenous teachers to teach Indigenous children. This undoubtedly reflects some of the difficulties involved in improving from a low starting point. Although there have been improvements, they have been limited and less wide-ranging than would have been hoped for. The Committee found too many examples of young non-Indigenous teachers with little preparation for teaching Indigenous students, and too few examples of appropriately qualified Indigenous people working as teachers. The Committee found that Indigenous people were making a significant contribution to the education of Indigenous children but that this was largely at the AIEW level.

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66 Mr Tony Greer, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 304

67 Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, *A Class Act: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession*, Parliament House, Canberra, 1998

6.96 Some of these concerns have been taken up by the State advisory bodies, who have incorporated recommendations from previous inquiries into their own recruitment and career development strategies. The Aboriginal Education and Training Council of Western Australia, for example, have developed a strategic plan that seeks to address some of these concerns.[68] Issues identified in community consultations included the design and implementation of career paths for AIEWs and Aboriginal Training Assistants, support for remote area teacher education programs, and cross-cultural induction for all education and training staff. The Committee believes that teacher preparation is an area of fundamental importance, and requires the urgent attention of all governments.

Recommendation 21

6.97 The Committee recommends that university schools and faculties of education address more effectively the need to provide trainee teachers with a much stronger grounding in theory and practice relating to the teaching of Indigenous children, including ESL.

Recommendation 22

6.98 The Committee recommends that MCEETYA draw up guidelines for improved induction courses for teachers posted to schools with significant Indigenous enrolments, including those teachers who are appointed to positions during the course of a year.

68 Submission No. 16, Aboriginal Education and Training Council of Western Australia, vol. 2, p. 4

CHAPTER 7

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

7.1 Much of the literature on Indigenous education focuses on the schools sector, where most Indigenous people begin and end their formal education. However, the post-secondary education sectors have seen increases in participation by Indigenous students over the last ten years. A number of witnesses in the inquiry identified issues relevant to vocational education and training, and to higher education.

7.2 A critical factor is the relatively poor level of participation of Indigenous people in senior secondary education. About 30 per cent of young Indigenous people currently complete secondary education, and the level of transfer directly into tertiary education remains low. This suggests two things: that Indigenous people will continue to participate in post-secondary education at relatively low levels; and that there will remain a significant level of demand for adult education, particularly at the preparatory level, among the mature age Indigenous population.

Vocational education and training

7.3 There have been particularly noteworthy increases in Indigenous participation in the VET sector in recent years. As one recent report states, the situation in the VET sector 'has changed from one of severe inequality between Indigenous students and other Australians with respect to access and participation in VET to one where equality in participation was reached by 1994'.[1] Between 1990 and 1998 the number of Indigenous students participating in recognised vocational education and training increased by almost threefold, from around 15,000 to almost 45,000. Indigenous students represented almost three per cent of the total VET sector student population in 1998, which was higher than the proportion of Indigenous people in the total Australian population (around two per cent).[2]

7.4 VET sector participation by Indigenous students in 1996 exceeded the levels for non-Indigenous students in all age groups except those aged 18 to 20. The growth in participation by Indigenous people aged 25 years and over was particularly strong between 1986 and 1996. Since 1996, however, there have been significant increases among the teenage Indigenous population, with annual growth rates of almost 25 per cent.[3] In contrast to the concerns frequently raised about the educational participation of young Indigenous Australians, levels of VET participation among Indigenous people aged 15 to 24 are now higher than among all young Australians.

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1 Chris Robinson and Paul Hughes, *Creating a sense of place: Indigenous peoples in vocational education and training*, NCVER, Kensington Park, SA, p. 8

2 *ibid.*, p. 7

3 *ibid.*, p. 11

7.5 Indigenous students, however, enter the VET sector with much lower levels of schooling than non-Indigenous students. In recent years the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has been narrowing. Increasing proportions of Indigenous VET students now have a year ten level of schooling or higher. There is a high degree of labour force attachment among Indigenous VET students, with around 46 per cent in employment. Indigenous VET students also tend to be concentrated in rural and remote areas. In 1998 less than 30 per cent were living in capital cities compared to 56 per cent of all VET students.[4]

7.6 The type of study undertaken by Indigenous VET students was significantly different to that undertaken by non-Indigenous VET students. Indigenous students were over-represented in TAFE multi-field education, and in arts, humanities and social science subjects. TAFE multi-field education consists mostly of courses providing a general secondary education, basic functional skills in specific areas, or technical skills across a number of fields of study. In terms of the stream of study, Indigenous students were more than twice as likely to be enrolled at the preparatory level but only half as likely to be enrolled at the para-professional or professional level.[5]

7.7 The level of participation was also different. Indigenous students were less likely to enrol in a Diploma or Associate Diploma level program. They were more likely to be enrolled in a course leading to a qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). However, Indigenous students tended to be concentrated in the lower AQF levels.[6]

7.8 About two per cent of apprentices and trainees in 1998 were Indigenous. This was roughly equivalent to the proportion of Indigenous people in the Australian population, and was a notable improvement on earlier levels of participation.[7] However, some differences in age participation still exist. Indigenous teenagers and young adults aged 15 to 24 years were far less likely to participate in apprenticeships or traineeships than other young Australians. Nearly half of all Indigenous apprentices and trainees were aged 25 years or older, compared to less than thirty per cent of all apprentices and trainees.

7.9 Indigenous VET students experienced higher withdrawal and failure rates than other VET students. Indigenous apprentice and trainee completions, however, made up 2.6 per cent of all completions in 1998. This was a good outcome given that Indigenous apprentices and trainees were about 1.9 per cent of the total. Indigenous apprentice and trainee completions were more likely to be at the lower AQF levels.[8]

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4 *ibid.*, pp. 14-16

5 *ibid.*, pp. 18-21

6 *ibid.*, pp. 21-22

7 *ibid.*, p. 25

8 *ibid.*, p. 35

7.10 The unemployment rate of Indigenous TAFE graduates was considerably higher than that of non-Indigenous graduates. The NCVER report found some improvement in employment prospects as a result of TAFE participation, although the figures suggest that these improvements were relatively slight. The most significant employment outcome was a conversion from part-time to full-time employment.

7.11 The VET sector was said by many witnesses in the inquiry to be an extremely important area for Indigenous people. A submission from the Australian Education Union quoted research showing that 'Indigenous school students have a better perception of TAFE than of schools'.[9] This submission also noted, however, that VET pathways for Indigenous students were mainly non-vocational, with two thirds completing 'catch-up or pre-vocational programmes'.[10]

7.12 An Indigenous educator in Adelaide reflected on his own background.

> My experience in TAFE demonstrated quite clearly that TAFE seems to be at the higher level of education and the first port of call for many of my people. The statistics show quite clearly that both enrolment, participation and graduation rates amongst Indigenous people in the TAFE system seem to be much higher than in any of the other education sectors. What is highlighted through various reports is a return to education by Indigenous people.[11]

7.13 The Committee visited and received submissions from several VET sector providers. The Southbank Institute of TAFE in Queensland described some of their activities to the Committee in their submission. The Institute has a Faculty of Indigenous Australian Peoples. The faculty has been operating for 17 years and offers diploma and certificate level courses in vocational access, tertiary preparation, welfare, justice studies, art and community management. The faculty has an even mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, and enrols about 550 Indigenous students each year.[12]

7.14 The Institute saw good support services as essential to the successful participation of Indigenous people in the sector.

> A growing number of individuals are talented and strong in their identity and so able to negotiate systems without added support. However, the majority still need the extra support available through dedicated courses, Indigenous support units, tutoring, Abstudy etc.[13]

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9 *ibid.*, p. 154

10 Submission No. 24, Australian Education Union, vol. 2, p. 154

11 Mr Roger Thomas, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 95

12 Submission No. 23, Southbank Institute of TAFE, vol. 2, p. 108

13 *ibid.*, p. 110

7.15 The need for good support services was emphasised by witnesses from vocational institutions in Geraldton, Port Adelaide and Kalgoorlie. The Kalgoorlie College of TAFE also highlighted the importance of industry involvement as well as the need for funding for mentor programs for Aboriginal people. An Aboriginal mining training program run jointly by the Kalgoorlie TAFE and Curtin University had been well received because it met the needs of industry. More than 50 per cent of students had accessed full-time employment. Many had been long-term unemployed when they started. The mining industry was involved in accreditation panels for the university and gave the university the prerequisites for students to get into the industry. The industry also participated on interview panels and helped to place suitable people. Mentoring was said to be an important form of support for Indigenous students. However, the current mentoring system was voluntary and was not as effective as previously, when it used to be a paid system.[14]

7.16 A recent publication from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs documents the findings from case studies of Indigenous New Apprenticeships. The case studies included traineeships in tour guiding, essential services maintenance, the construction industry, television and radio production, and education. The findings suggested that the policies of flexibility underlying the National Training Framework could be compatible with Indigenous specific traineeships, and that Indigenous communities and enterprises would benefit significantly from the establishment of an Indigenous oriented infrastructure within the VET sector responsible for nationally recognised Indigenous traineeships. Principles of good practice identified in the study included 'embedded' training involving community members in planning and development, comprehensive training support, culturally relevant course materials leading to nationally recognised qualifications, committed advocacy on the part of trainers, and structured continuing evaluation.[15]

7.17 The Committee was also told of other VET sector programs. Some of these programs are described in more detail in the curriculum chapter. While programs such as these are important initiatives, there continue to be problems in the provision of VET programs, particularly in smaller regional centres and remote areas. Lack of appropriate facilities, infrastructure and staff were said to be the principal barriers to improving access to VET programs. In small towns such as Brewarrina, for instance, there was said to be a strong demand for VET programs but only limited facilities. One suggested option was to combine the school and TAFE in order to create a better critical mass of staff and resources, although differing award conditions for staff would need to be resolved. In more remote areas the major problems were a lack of good telecommunications infrastructure, poor housing and facilities for staff, and the costs involved in placing staff in remote communities. Funding models based on employment outcomes were also said to limit access to VET programs for those communities in very poor labour markets.

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14 Site visit, Kalgoorlie TAFE

15 John Henry et. al., *Developing Best Practice with Indigenous New Apprenticeships*, REB Report 3/99, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra, 1999

7.18 The Committee was encouraged to see the improved level of Indigenous participation in the VET sector. The sector is of obvious importance in Indigenous education and training. This has been recognised with the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC) to advise the ANTA board on training issues for Indigenous people. The fact that the sector appears to be attracting increased numbers of young Indigenous people is also important. The Committee remains concerned, however, at the limited affect on employment. The effect this has on access to resources needs careful monitoring. The Committee is also concerned at the level of access to VET sector programs in some rural and remote areas. While much has been done to improve access, as evidenced by increased levels of participation, these improvements do not appear to have been uniform. Improving access in rural and remote areas will depend to some extent on the provision of appropriate resources. However, there is much that could also be done to use existing resources more effectively, including a more efficient sharing of resources between the various educational sectors.

Adult education and the independent sector

7.19 Much of the growth in Indigenous participation in post-compulsory education has been among the mature age population. Low levels of previous educational attainment among this population have meant a strong demand for introductory, enabling and bridging courses. Many institutions are now providing these courses. However, other factors such as low socio-economic circumstances, extended family responsibilities and negative prior experiences of schooling (and sometimes of other government agencies such as legal and welfare systems) also need to be taken into account. The fact that many mature age Indigenous people are returning to education is a cause for celebration but should not blind us to the fact that they have particular needs and that returning to education is, for many, a difficult undertaking.

7.20 The independent Aboriginal community colleges have taken the lead in providing assistance to the most disadvantaged sections of this population. The Committee visited two independent community colleges, Tauondi College in Port Adelaide and the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs, and also received submissions from a number of colleges. The colleges are controlled and managed by Indigenous people and communities. They provide a varied program, including short non-accredited adult and community education courses, language and cultural programs, literacy and numeracy training, preparatory and bridging courses, and accredited VET sector programs. In recent years the colleges have been moving more towards providing formally accredited VET programs. Tauondi College, for example, began running VET sector programs in 1994.

7.21 The independent colleges often find themselves in an invidious position. They need to be able to address educational outcomes in order to justify continued funding and yet, because of the nature of their student population, they often need to be able to address non-educational issues before they can expect to achieve educational outcomes. This situation was put to the Committee by the principal of Tauondi College in Port Adelaide. 'Equally for adults – the population that we service – there

are some real social needs and human needs that cannot be met if you play to the tune of simply sticking to the indicators that are laid down or negotiated between a provider agency, a state government and a Commonwealth government'.[16] This was a theme that was repeated in submissions to the inquiry. The independent providers are often the first entry point back into education for the most disadvantaged section of the population, and the complex range of social and personal issues they need to deal with are insufficiently recognised by governments.

7.22 Nevertheless, recent research seems to indicate that the independent colleges can achieve good measurable educational outcomes. A survey of students who completed programs in four of the largest Aboriginal community-controlled colleges in 1997 found that 62 per cent of enrolments resulted in a pass. This was a much higher pass rate than among Indigenous VET sector students as a whole. The strong result was put down to the attractive learning environment and the extra support provided for students by the independent colleges. It was particularly impressive given the level of disadvantage of students at the independent colleges. Nearly 50 per cent of these students had not completed Year 10 compared to 28 per cent of Indigenous VET sector students as a whole. The study also noted, however, that students in the independent colleges withdrew from their courses at more than double the rate of other Indigenous VET sector students.[17]

7.23 Funding issues and the relationship between education departments and the independent colleges were raised with the Committee by a number of witnesses. The ATSIC submission called for greater transparency in funding arrangements. Tensions between educational and social priorities may in part explain the conflicts that sometimes arise between the independent providers and some of the state and territory education departments. It is no excuse, however, for a lack of transparency in funding arrangements on the part of some education departments. This situation was observed by the Committee in Alice Springs in relation to the Institute for Aboriginal Development. Approximately $2.6 million in Commonwealth infrastructure funding for the Institute had been held up by the Northern Territory government.

7.24 This was said to be due to a dispute over the land on which the Institute was sited. The Institute had been told that it would need to give up this land and co-locate with another institution before the Northern Territory government would approve the funds to be made available. Whatever the merits of the case, such an attitude seems to fly in the face of all recommendations made over the last ten years regarding self-determination and community control of educational decision making. Representatives from the IAD made it quite clear to the Committee that they were

16 Mr Bill Wilson, *Hansard*, Port Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 137

17 Deborah Durnan and Bob Boughton, *Succeeding Against the Odds: The outcomes attained by Indigenous students in Aboriginal community-controlled adult education colleges*, NCVER, Kensington Park, SA, 1999, pp. ix-xi

opposed to the proposed move.[18] On February 11, 2000 the Northern Territory government released the funds to the IAD without explanation.

7.25 While there are obviously a range of views on specific issues such as this one, there is no excuse for a lack of transparency in funding arrangements. Lack of transparency in funding was raised by a number of other witnesses, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

Recommendation 23

7.26 Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the ANTA Act be amended to ensure that capital works funding for independent education providers goes directly to institutions.

7.27 Adult education also has an important role to play in community development and self determination for Indigenous peoples. The Committee considers that adult education has received insufficient attention from policy makers given its importance to the Indigenous community.

Recommendation 24

7.28 The Committee recommends that all governments recognise in their policies, educational structures and funding allocation, the central role that adult education providers and their programs play in Indigenous development.

Higher education

7.29 As in the VET sector, higher education has seen some significant improvements in levels of Indigenous participation and outcomes in recent years. Between 1988 and 1996 the number of Indigenous higher education students more than doubled, from 3,000 to 7,500, while the number of award course completions trebled to nearly 1,000.[19]

7.30 Unlike the VET sector, however, levels of participation by Indigenous students in higher education remained well below those for all students. While there were absolute gains in participation, these occurred at a time of overall expansion in the higher education sector, resulting in little improvement in the relative position of Indigenous students. The level and type of study being undertaken also differed. Indigenous students tended to be concentrated in lower level qualifications and in particular fields of study. Substantial numbers of Indigenous higher education students were also undertaking enabling or non-award courses.

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18 Ms Donna Ah Chee, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 247

19 Chris Robinson and Lional Bamblett, *Making a difference: The impact of Australia's Indigenous education and training policy*, NCVER, Kensington Park, SA, 1998, p. 19

7.31 Many witnesses emphasised the importance of good support structures in post-compulsory education. The evidence suggested that curriculum was less of an issue but that culturally appropriate support was crucial. Special financial assistance through the Aboriginal Student Assistance Scheme (Abstudy) was also seen as essential. There has been strong support over the years for the retention of Abstudy as a separate financial assistance scheme, and vigorous opposition to any attempts to incorporate it into other financial assistance schemes.

7.32 In Adelaide the Committee spoke to representatives from the National Union of Students. Ms Nicole D'Antoine is an Indigenous economics student at the University of Adelaide and is the sole Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student representative on the NUS in Australia. Ms D'Antoine stressed the importance to Indigenous students of good support structures in universities.[20] In her own instance, Ms D'Antoine was the only Indigenous student studying for a Bachelor of Economics at the University of Adelaide. Although coming from a family background where education was highly valued, she still found it a difficult situation. Many Indigenous higher education students are faced with similar situations, particularly in those areas of study where Indigenous students have not been well represented in the past. The NUS have set up a student support network for Indigenous students providing peer support on such issues as living away from home and undertaking university study.

7.33 The submission from the National Union of Students highlighted the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support units.[21] Many Indigenous people, including those in metropolitan areas, live considerable distances from higher education institutions. University study often means moving away from home. Indigenous support units provide a crucial role in helping Indigenous students make the transition to university life.

7.34 A review of Commonwealth support funding for Indigenous higher education students was undertaken in 1996.[22] In 1997, the Higher Education Council examined the arrangements for the allocation of Commonwealth support funding. The Council found that performance-based support funding as a general approach was accepted by support staff. However, the Council found a level of uncertainty among support staff about the amount allocated to institutions, and the decisions made within institutions on allocation of funding for support programs.[23] This issue was commented on in the ATSIC submission, which pointed to a lack of transparency in the internal processes used to allocate funds within universities.[24] ATSIC recommended a formal agreement

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20 Ms Nicole D'Antoine, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 112

21 Submission No. 25, National Union of Students, vol. 2, p. 188

22 Dennis Ham, *A Review of Support Funding for Indigenous Australian Students in Higher Education*, 1996

23 G V Stanley, *A Review of Institutional Use of Commonwealth Higher Education Funding for Indigenous Australian Students*, NBEET, Canberra, 1997, pp. xi-xiii

24 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, pp. 147-148

requiring higher education institutions to achieve transparency in their expenditure of Indigenous support funding.[25]

7.35 Financial assistance through Abstudy was seen as particularly important in the higher education sector. There was strong support in many submissions for the maintenance of Abstudy as a separate scheme. This has been a persistent theme in Indigenous education over the past ten years. ATSIC recommended to the Committee the maintenance of Abstudy as a separate scheme, and presented the Committee with a report it had commissioned on the impact of recent changes to the scheme. The report analysed the likely effect of changes to Abstudy which are due to come into effect in the year 2000. The report found that the changes are likely to advantage only a small proportion of the Abstudy student population and are likely to disadvantage a significant proportion of mature age students. The report drew attention to the importance in Indigenous education of the mature age student population.[26] In evidence to the Committee in Canberra, witnesses from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs drew attention to the fact that some Indigenous students would be better off under the new arrangements but acknowledged that partnered students over 21 years of age would be worse off.[27]

Recommendation 25

7.36 The Committee recommends that DETYA monitor and report on the impact of the changes to Abstudy to come into effect in 2000, and particularly their impact on mature age and rural and remote students.

7.37 One important issue identified by some witnesses in the inquiry was the means of access into higher education, and the relatively low numbers of Indigenous students who make the transition from school into higher education. There were some comments from Roger Thomas, an Indigenous academic from the University of Adelaide, on the numbers of open access students at university.

> ... we are still having difficulties and experiencing lots of problems in terms of the very poor numbers of Indigenous students that are coming from year 12 into the university sector. ... There is a much higher percentage that comes through the TAFE system without year 12 and through preparatory type programs and then progresses on to undergraduate mainstream studies.[28]

7.38 It was suggested that open access students experienced more problems in adjusting to university life because of their low exposure to formal education, and the effects of other pressures such as family commitments. In 1998 all of the 141

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25 *ibid.*, p. 120

26 Wendy Brabham and John Henry, *Analysis of the Proposed Changes to Abstudy on Indigenous Students*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Canberra, 1999

27 Mr Tony Greer, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 301

28 Mr Roger Thomas, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, pp. 95-96

Indigenous students who enrolled in mainstream courses at the University of Adelaide gained entry through open access arrangements. Few if any would have completed Year 12. It was reported that data from previous years showed that students who had completed Year 12 did better at University than those who had not completed Year 12.[29]

7.39 A number of higher education institutions participated in the inquiry. They included the University of Newcastle, Edith Cowan University, James Cook University, and the Batchelor Institute. Programs provided by these institutions are described briefly here. Some of their evidence is also included in the chapters on teacher education and curriculum.

7.40 Edith Cowan University in Western Australia is the location of the Kurongkurl Katitjin ('Coming Together to Learn') School of Indigenous Australian Studies. The University (formerly the Western Australian College of Advanced Education) has been providing educational programs for Indigenous students for over 22 years. These include a teacher training program, a number of 'bridging' or 'enabling' courses, and studies in mainstream university disciplines. In 1998 there were 644 Indigenous students enrolled at the University. Most of these students (573) were enrolled in the Aboriginal University Orientation Course. There were also 71 tertiary degree students studying across several metropolitan campuses and a regional centre located in Broome.[30] A submission from one staff member commented on the positive contribution the University had made to Indigenous education through the provision of bridging courses but also pointed to some problems, including a lack of awareness of priorities and policies in Indigenous education among senior management.

7.41 Staff from the Umulliko Centre at the University of Newcastle provided a submission documenting the extent to which the University was meeting recommendations in Indigenous education. In general, they considered that the University had taken 'a serious and substantial approach to implementation of most of these recommendations'. Major steps that the University had taken included the setting of a two per cent Indigenous employment target across all employment fields, and the establishment of a Board of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Training reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor. The University had also implemented formal community management structures in each element of its Indigenous academic program.[31]

7.42 Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education provides a range of professional and para-professional courses in both the VET and higher education sectors. It has an enrolment of almost 2,000 students, the majority of whom are from remote areas of the Northern Territory and use English as a second (or subsequent)

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29 *ibid.*, p. 101

30 Submission No. 8, Ms Karen Mallard, vol. 1, p. 61

31 Submission No. 10, Umulliko Centre, University of Newcastle, vol. 1, pp. 86-87

language. About 15 per cent of enrolments are also from interstate. The Institute pointed to the importance of delivery in the community as well as to a need to broaden the experiences of students. This had led to the adoption of 'mixed mode' methods of delivery, where students were mostly based in their home communities and attended intensive workshops at one of the Institutes campuses several times a year. Most students were mature age, with very low levels of prior educational achievment.[32] On 1 July of this year the Institute became an independent organisation with a majority Aboriginal controlled council.[33]

7.43 James Cook University in north Queensland has a large, culturally diverse Indigenous population. It includes students from the Torres Strait Islands, traditionally oriented Aboriginal communities and relatively small but unsettled urban populations A number of Indigenous students are enrolled in mainstream tertiary programs. A large proportion are also in university access courses run in a number of locations (including a prison). The University also runs a Remote Area Teacher Education Program in the Torres Strait. The direction of Indigenous tertiary students was described as 'still quite narrow'. They were predominantly enrolled in teacher education, health areas or law.[34]

7.44 Some institutions were running external study programs for Indigenous students. Organisations such as Open Learning Australia were investigating the use of on-line delivery to provide higher education courses in remote areas. These developments are described in more detail in the curriculum chapter. Some states were also implementing programs to encourage tertiary participation by Indigenous students. One example was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Aspirations Program run by Education Queensland.

7.45 One of the recommendations of the Hughes report involved the establishment of eight Aboriginal Education Centres in higher education institutions. Under the Commonwealth Higher Education Innovations Programme, funding of $10.3 million was provided in late 1996 and early 1997 for the establishment of six Centres.[35] A number of other centres have already been established and are now funded through the universities.

7.46 In general, the higher education sector has not been an area of substantial Indigenous involvement. However, it has become increasingly importance in recent years. While there have been significant gains in Indigenous participation over the past ten years, levels of participation still lag well behind those of the mainstream population. The higher education sector plays an important role in access to higher level skills and knowledge in areas such as health, education, administration and the

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32 Submission No. 36, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, vol. 5, pp. 204-210

33 Ms Ann Davis, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 235

34 Professor Rhondda Jones and Professor Robin McTaggart, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, pp. 151-152

35 Submission No. 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, vol. 4, p. 57

legal system. These areas are all important to the social and economic advancement of Indigenous peoples. Low participation will continue to hinder the ability of Indigenous communities to develop and to negotiate with the wider community. The evidence suggests that appropriate, well resourced support structures are important to the success of Indigenous students in higher education. The evidence also suggests that Indigenous students access higher education in different ways to the mainstream population and that policies on higher education need to take this into account. In particular, the evidence suggests that for many Indigenous students higher education is part of a continuum of study that frequently begins with a return to education from very low levels of previous educational achievement. Other sectors such as VET and adult education play important roles in this process.

Recommendation 26

7.47 The Committee recommends that policy makers take into account the particular needs of Indigenous students in post-compulsory education and provide appropriate levels of support for these students.

Recommendation 27

7.48 The Committee recommends that funding directed towards higher education institutions for the purposes of Indigenous education should be adequate to ensure effective and appropriate educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

CHAPTER 8

THE IMPACT OF HEALTH ON EDUCATION

The relationship between poor economic status, health and education

8.1 Any examination of the processes and outcomes in Indigenous education require consideration of the effects of poor health upon children's learning opportunities. Poor health hinders many Indigenous children's school attendance and restricts their ability to learn. The *Learning Lessons* report referred to this as

> ... a domino effect of health and social problems leading to children suffering serious hearing loss, being malnourished and getting insufficient sleep which then leads to poor attendance and non-punctuality which impedes effective learning outcomes.[1]

8.2 Health problems are intrinsically linked with socio-economic standing. Poor health, including ear, eye, dental and malnutrition problems, often coexists with poverty. Unfortunately, many Indigenous communities still live in impoverished conditions, lacking adequate access to appropriate health care services, and therefore exhibit resultant health problems.

8.3 A 1994 ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey [NATSIS] found that in the four-week period prior to the survey approximately ten per cent of Indigenous people were living in conditions lacking either water supply, toilets, electricity or gas.[2] A 1997 study of environmental health needs in Aboriginal communities found the following.

> A total of 210 occupied discrete Aboriginal communities (containing almost 16,000 people) were surveyed. Of these, about 8% of communities had an inadequate water source, 8% were without adequate sewerage treatment and/or disposal systems, and 5% had no electricity supply. Among communities that did have electricity, about 40% had regular interruptions in supply. At the time of the survey, about 44% of dwellings had no functioning hot water service (24% had no service at all, while 20% had a service that was not currently working). About 25% of dwellings had no functioning kitchen sink, bath/shower and/or toilet.[3]

8.4 There is little doubt that the level of educational achievement significantly affects employment prospects, which in turn affects income, access to health care, and

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1 Northern Territory Department of Education, Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, p. 27

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, 4704.0. 1999, p. 49

3 *ibid.*, p. 49

standard of housing. Conversely, poor health, poverty and poor quality housing adversely affects school attendance and learning outcomes. Education has been traditionally viewed as a route out of poverty for those living in disadvantage.[4] A higher level of educational attainment is therefore likely to improve health standards.

8.5 This was powerfully illustrated by evidence at a public hearing in Alice Springs.

> The evidence from around the world is very striking: with the addition of a single extra year of education in a population, the infant mortality rate drops by between seven and ten per cent. This has been found throughout the Third World. It has been found historically in a series of mortality data in relation to Western countries. It is basically one of the most substantiated findings in the literature of the social determinants of health that one of the major factors influencing child mortality is the level of education amongst their parents. There is also a great deal of research which shows that education has a positive effect on the health of people themselves, not just on the health of their children.[5]

8.6 Because of the connection between people's health and education opportunities it is necessary to view these two areas holistically rather than in isolation. *Learning Lessons* called for high level support and for systemic policy requiring Governments and Government departments to 'inextricably link education and health in Indigenous communities'.[6] Poor health and low education perpetuate poverty and each other's existence. To assist Indigenous people break out of this cycle of poverty it is therefore imperative to improve the health of Indigenous children in order to enable them to improve their educational attainment and their opportunities for a better and healthier lifestyle.

Barriers to adequate health care

8.7 For Indigenous people barriers to adequate health services include those that are common to people living in remote areas, and to those who are economically disadvantaged: distance to medical and related services, transport, lack of private health insurance and funds to finance travel to access health services. In addition, services available are not always culturally appropriate for Indigenous people. The importance of Indigenous involvement in the provision of health services is vital as it greatly assists in eliminating cultural and communication barriers.

8.8 Language and communication difficulties affect both health and education. Poor English language skills are a barrier for some Indigenous people in taking

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4 D Acheson, *Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health Report*, UK, 1998 http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/doh/ih/part2b.htm (September 1999)

5 Dr Bob Boughton, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, p. 274

6 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, p. 27

advantage of available health services. In many locations, Indigenous health workers help span this gap ensuring that communication difficulties do not prevent a child from receiving all available care.

Health problems of Indigenous Australians

8.9 Literature surveys identify a wide range of health problems within Indigenous communities. Some are localised while others are more widespread. The main causes of mortality in Indigenous populations are cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory disease, and injury or poisoning.[7]

8.10 Although there has been much publicity concerning substance abuse [alcohol, tobacco, petrol sniffing, and kava] in some Indigenous communities, the Committee heard little evidence of this affecting education in the communities it visited in the course of this inquiry. The main reference to substance abuse was to some community members drinking throughout the night causing difficulties for children to get enough sleep to enable them to get up early enough for school and to be in an attentive frame of mind. The effects of alcohol on education was summed up in one submission as:

> Alcohol impinges on the participation and achievement of Aboriginal children through its direct influence on levels of poverty, ill-health, abuse poor parental care and neglect of family responsibility.[8]

8.11 The Committee acknowledges substance abuse is a profoundly serious problem in many Indigenous communities. There are numerous programs designed to address these problems and it is not possible to survey them all here. The Committee noted the Living with Alcohol Program in the Northern Territory that is funded through a levy on liquor and an additional cask wine levy, which is administered by the Territory Health Services. The program supports diverse community initiatives such as night patrols, support services for domestic violence and sexual assault victims, tobacco and petrol sniffing education programs, employment of Aboriginal wardens, diversionary programs for youths or establishing a youth centre. *Learning Lessons* listed both alcohol related sleep deprivation and children's own substance abuse as a key cause for poor school attendance and concentration. It reported anecdotal evidence from research done in Tennant Creek by the Menzies School of Health Research linking community alcohol intervention and children having enough money for school lunches.[9]

8.12 Given the minimal evidence presented to the Committee, the focus of this chapter will be on the two health issues raised by witnesses as having the most detrimental effect on the education of Indigenous children. From the evidence

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7 Professor Jacinta Elston, *Hansard,* Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 225

8 Submission No. 21, Kakadu Employment, Education and Training Group, vol 2, p. 87

9 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, pp. 153-154

gathered by the Committee in the course of its inquiry the two most prevalent issues were:

- otitis media; and
- poor nutrition.

Otitis Media – the silent barrier to learning

8.13 One of the most common health problems for Aboriginal children is otitis media. It is a middle ear disease that affects up to one hundred per cent of infants and a high proportion of children in remote Aboriginal communities. The recurrent nature of the disease afflicts infants through to teenagers. Its incidence decreases with age.

Prevalence of the disease in Indigenous children

8.14 The World Health Organisation considers that the occurrence of otitis media in anything over four per cent of a given population requires urgent attention. One survey revealed that over twenty per cent of all northern Australian Aboriginal children are affected by otitis media.[10] Evidence gathered by the Committee indicates that in many communities there is a much higher incidence than this. Neither is it confined to remote communities, as the following comment from a principal in Bourke indicates.

> It was not until recent times that we had all of our students tested for 'glue ear' – otitis media. Of the first 35 students who were tested we found that 27 of them had from moderate to severe ear problems.
>
> That absolutely staggered my staff and me. We have gone into a program now of alerting staff to those children who have this problem and they are much more aware. ... we have wired teachers for sound and we have four speakers in the corners of the rooms. It is important to make teachers more aware of what otitis media is and make sure that children have been tested. ... Certainly, we can and should be doing more in that medical-educational setting.[11]

8.15 The Committee was told that screen testing for hearing at Indigenous schools revealed that on any given day an average of half to two thirds of Indigenous children suffered otitis media related hearing loss in one or both ears.[12] This was confirmed by Professor Wronski at the Committee's Townsville public hearing.[13] Recently it was

10 Submission No. 35, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, vol 5, p. 191

11 Mr Desmond O'Malley, *Hansard*, Bourke, 26 July 1999, p. 73

12 Ms Kath Johnson, *Hansard Precis*, Cairns, 2 August 1999, p. 4

13 Professor Ian Wronski, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, p. 226

reported that over 90 per cent of year four students in a bush school were found to have no eardrums.[14]

8.16 A monthly study of forty-one Aboriginal infants in far northern Queensland discovered that during the period of the study one hundred per cent had otitis media and over thirty three per cent had perforated eardrums. Perforated eardrums occurred in infants as young as forty-four days and the mean duration was just over forty-four days.[15] The impact of this on children's later learning ability is discussed below under the heading of auditory processing disorders.

The significance of otitis media in Indigenous children

8.17 The importance of hearing difficulties in relation to learning ability can be understood when one considers that school based learning depends upon children's ability to listen. In addition to the primary difficulties caused by hearing loss, if their ability to learn is further affected by an inability to hear correctly, young children are hugely disadvantaged in learning to read. People who have not mastered reading skills in the early years of schooling will find all subsequent school-based learning a struggle. Hence, their learning disabilities are compounded. For those Indigenous children who do not speak standard Australian English at home, hearing difficulties can magnify the complexities of learning to master new languages and dialects at school.

8.18 Professor Kame'enui from the University of Oregon confirmed this in his keynote address at the recent Australian Association of Special Education 1999 National Conference. He said it was crucial for children to be capable readers by year three, or age eight. This is when the focus of teaching changes from 'learning to read to reading to learn'. Professor Kame'enui believes the chances of a child without adequate literacy skills succeeding after this point were remote.[16] This emphasises the importance of minimising the impact of otitis media in the pre and early years of schooling. It is essential that maximum effort be expended to remove additional, avoidable barriers to learning for Indigenous children.

8.19 Significantly higher rates of learning disabled students have consistently been found to have a history of chronic otitis media.[17] The early onset of otitis media has also been associated with physical growth retardation. One study found that 37.5 per

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14 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, p. 120

15 J Boswell, 'Presentation of early otitis media in 'Top End' Aboriginal infants', *Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 1997, p. 21, pp. 100-102 as quoted in M Batten, T Frigo, P Hughes, N McNamara, *Enhancing English Literacy Skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students*, Australian Council for Educational Research, 1998, p. 5

16 'Children who can't read by 8 "destined to fail"', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 September 1999, p. 3

17 Andrew Higgins, *Addressing the Health and Educational Consequences of Otitis Media Among Young Rural School-aged Children*, The Australian Rural Education Research Association Inc, 1997 http://www.nexus.edu.au/TeachStud/arera/Otitis/contents.html (September 1999)

cent and 29 per cent of children below the weight and height percentiles had a perforated tympanic membrane.[18] Yet otitis media is largely a controllable disease, whose impact could be minimised by greater efforts to identify and treat the disease.

8.20 The disease can affect children's learning ability in three ways:

- temporary and re-occurring hearing loss;
- permanent hearing damage ; and
- auditory processing disorders

Temporary hearing loss

8.21 At several inspections and public hearings, the Committee heard of the adverse effects of hearing loss on students' ability to learn. One of the most obvious impacts of the disease is upon school attendance.

> In my experience, the major reason for not going to school was ill health. At any given time, up to 95 per cent of the kids could have educationally significant hearing loss due to otitis media ...[19]

8.22 The unpredictable nature of the re-occurrence of Otitis Media is a constant source of frustration for educators. A child could be tested today and have no signs of hearing loss, yet tomorrow the same child could be suffering a re-occurrence of otitis media with its attendant loss of hearing.

8.23 The infection begins in the middle ear causing the child to get 'glue ear' which is a build-up of thick fluid in the middle ear. This build-up can cause the eardrum to burst, releasing the discharge. It is the build-up of fluid that causes temporary deafness. During the time of infection, the child may suffer *fluctuating* hearing loss. This means that at any given moment it is impossible to predict the severity of the hearing loss. They may hear the teacher's voice at one moment but one hour later be totally unaware the teacher is speaking to them. The quality, quantity and intensity of sounds heard by the child can vary greatly within one day.

8.24 The Committee found that the problem was not confined to remote areas. The Principal of Cairns West State Primary School, a predominantly Indigenous school, expressed concern that fluctuating deafness was more difficult to identify and deal with than the permanently impaired students within the deaf unit at the school. Similarly, a research project which observed North-East Arnhem Land children for a period of two years found that it was the children with fluctuating chronic hearing loss who experienced the greatest communication and learning difficulties. The authors of the research paper believed this was because, out of necessity, the children with severe

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18 *ibid.*

19 Dr Christine Nicholls, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 27 July 1999, p. 107

hearing difficulties had developed extensive strategies to compensate for their disability.[20]

8.25 Early detection and treatment has a dramatic effect in controlling the disease and limiting its impact upon children's hearing and the extent of permanent ear damage.

Permanent hearing disorders

8.26 The constant inflammation and perforation of the eardrum can cause permanent damage. Scarring can result from constant perforations. Sometimes the perforation is so severe it simply does not heal completely. The infection can also cause damage to the three tiny bones between the middle and inner ear. Some children may be profoundly deaf by the time they reach school age. More common, however, is the partial loss of hearing in one or both ears.

8.27 The Committee inspected the deaf unit at Cairns West State Primary School whose students were predominantly Indigenous. The Committee saw first-hand evidence of the point made above that those children with perforated eardrums often fall within the lower height and weight percentiles.

Auditory processing disorders

8.28 The first two to three years of a child's life are critical years for language development. When these years are plagued by continual bouts of temporary hearing losses, auditory processing disorders may develop which continue long after full hearing has returned. The impact is that these children have significant difficulty processing auditory information, a lower verbal intelligence, and generalised speech and language disorders. These children have a continuing impairment of ability to focus on, discriminate, recognise or comprehend oral information. The incidence of this problem was studied in a Menzies School of Health Research project which found 38 per cent of the 1,050 students involved with the project suffered from Central Auditory Processing Disorder. Other findings included: 16 per cent meet the current criteria for individual FM hearing aids; 24 per cent had educationally significant conductive hearing loss; and 40 per cent had active ear disease and/or needed re-constructive middle ear surgery. As part of the trial, FM sound field amplification systems were installed in the classrooms; remedial treatment for existing conditions became part of the school or communities' everyday health care system; and a phonics program specifically designed for Indigenous students learning English as a foreign language was added to the curriculum. This resulted in dramatic improvements in the

20 Anne Lowell, Budukulawuy, Gurimangu, Maypilama and Nyomba, "Communication and Learning in an Aboriginal School: The influence of Conductive Hearing Loss", *The Aboriginal Child at School*, vol. 23, No. 4, 1995, p. 3

participating students' literacy levels, but only for those students who attended school for at least 75 per cent of the trial period. [21]

8.29 Auditory processing problems are exacerbated when the child's first language is Indigenous and they then enter a school environment where English is the teaching medium. The phonemes of the English language will be new to a child who is accustomed to hearing only their native language. Additionally, their ability to master English is somewhat dependent on their mastery of their native tongue. Gaps in the framework of their native tongue are a shaky foundation from which to learn English. A noisy classroom environment aggravates hearing difficulties and auditory processing problems further.

8.30 Indigenous children can often feel isolated and ill at ease in the foreign structured setting of formal schooling. Hearing difficulties exacerbate this feeling of isolation. In addition, when a teacher is ignorant of the disability caused by any of these otitis media related problems, they can sometimes label a child as insolent, ignorant or lazy, when in fact, the behavioural 'problem' is caused by a medical problem – the child simply does not hear the teacher's instruction or most of the lesson. These misunderstandings further alienate the child from the teacher, school environment and even their peers. This alienation increases the likelihood of that child dropping out of or skipping school.

Contributing factors to otitis media

8.31 Despite common acceptance that it is viral or bacterial in origin, no single bacterium or fungus has been isolated as a common cause. Otitis media is commonly found in third world countries and communities with low socio-economic standards of living. It has been linked, with varying degrees of confidence and scepticism, to poor hygiene, overcrowded housing, nutrition, vitamin deficiency, and inherent immunological problems. It is likely that a combination of factors stimulate its occurrence. Treating the disease must therefore also include isolating the individual contributing factors and minimising their effect, where possible. Indigenous children have a poor immunological response to introduced infections like influenza and the common cold.

8.32 This could explain the results of a 1992 study comparing the incidence of hearing loss between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in Brisbane schools. The Indigenous children had significantly higher levels of ear complaints than their non-Indigenous counterparts, yet much lower incidence than Indigenous children from remote areas. [22] It is most probable that the city-based children had access to better living conditions - clean water, better housing, greater variety in food – yet similar immune responses as country-based Indigenous children.

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21 As quoted in Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 152

22 B McPherson and E Knox, 'Hearing loss in urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (1992), pp 2, 60-70 as quoted in Batten (1998), p. 227

8.33 Although swimming in muddy creeks is a known causal factor for infection in children with perforated eardrums, swimming in clean, flowing creeks, swimming pools, or the ocean has proven to be beneficial. It is suggested that this is due to hygiene factors as well as the healing properties of salt water. The Committee heard anecdotal evidence of significant reduction in children's ear infections in Central Australian communities with chlorinated swimming pools. From evidence gathered by the Committee in the course of its inquiry and from a literature survey, the most obvious and prevalent catalyst factor is the common cold.

To minimise the impact of otitis media

8.34 Despite the complexities contributing to the occurrence of otitis media, the Committee heard of several strategies that have been successfully used to reduce its impact and occurrence.

Health education

8.35 The Committee heard repeatedly that the involvement and support of the Indigenous community is a vital to the successful identification and treatment of the physical ailments that impede learning. Indigenous involvement minimises the cultural and language barriers to health education and services. This was confirmed by the ABS survey where over three-quarters of Indigenous people ranked Indigenous involvement in health services as important.[23]

8.36 Aboriginal health workers play a crucial role in educating communities and in securing their support in the early detection and treatment of ailments like otitis media. The Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services has acknowledged the essential work done by Aboriginal health workers and their need for continued training.[24]

8.37 The Committee received evidence that the education of Indigenous health workers in the Northern Territory left much to be desired. In the 1970s Aboriginal health workers (AHWs) received training which put emphasis on community health care and recognition of basic clinical skills. Health literacy and numeracy were components of the training of AHWs. According to one submission, this successful model has been replaced by one in which Batchelor College has been contracted to provide training which is more suited to the needs of mainstream trainees than Indigenous people from remote communities. As the submission describes the current system of training:

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23 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4704.0, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, 1999, p. 71

24 Speech by Dr Ian Anderson, Medical Adviser to the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services, Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, to the World Health Organisation's Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, *Overview of Indigenous Health Status in Australia*, 24 September 1997

http://www.health.gov.au/about/cmo/indhea.htm (October 1999)

> Few remote, low-literacy health worker recruits have experience of mainstream work or education, At great expense they are dragged long distances from home to sit in classes, often taught by poorly experienced earnest lecturers with little idea of the students needs or skills, with no literacy support. Some students sit it out to get a job. Most others drop out, for they are often mature people with family responsibilities, shamed by poor literacy, harassed by domestic problems when away from home, unable to live on Abstudy, confused by lecturers concerns and barely supported in their community clinic (nurses usually have neither time, proper instruction, or often even understanding, to follow up classes).[25]

8.38 The Central Australian and Barkly Aboriginal health workers' Association claims that educational institutions have a vested financial interest in the current arrangements, and would resist moves to take training back to the communities. It claims that many health promotion and specialist training interests have done well out of the poor health of Indigenous people, the benefits going to urban based personnel who make weekly forays to remote communities 'bearing another stranger talking about something different the community should do'. The Association is not opposed to competency-based training and agrees with the direction of the VET sector traineeship system, but it favours the funding through DETYA of community–based trainers.[26]

8.39 The Committee takes note of evidence it has received of the need for government decisions to take account of community needs and cultural sensitivities. Just as education services must be provided by people familiar and empathetic to local cultures, the same consideration should be given to the education of local health workers. The Committee makes a general recommendation that governments and educational institutions bear these important matters in mind and it notes many existing initiatives in this regard. For example all non-Aboriginal health staff in the Northern Territory must undergo an Aboriginal cultural awareness training course.[27]

Access to professional health care

8.40 Despite the remarkably high incidence of hearing impairments in children in remote and rural areas, their access to specialist hearing services remains significantly below that for children in metropolitan areas.[28] Given the status awarded by the World Health Organisation for a health issue such as this, the Committee considers it very important that this situation be improved. Specialist ear nose and throat [ENT] outreach [visiting] programs already exist in the Northern Territory, yet the need still far outweighs the provision of service.

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25 Submission No.13, Central Australian and Barkly Aboriginal Health Workers' Association, vol.1, p.149

26 ibid, p. 151

27 http://www.nt.gov.au/nths/aboriginal/apac/apactintro.html (November 1999)

28 Submission No. 35, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, vol 5, p. 192

8.41 The problem of getting enough specialists into remote communities is not particular to audiologists and ENT surgeons. One option could be a focus by professionals on otitis media similar to the Fred Hollows program of targeting trachoma. Some medical practitioners use their annual leave to treat disadvantaged groups. The Committee commends this practice and believes that this could be promoted among professionals as community service. Tax concessions could be made for expenses. Similarly, students in their final years of university could be encouraged to visit remote locations working alongside permanent and visiting professionals to gain some intense practical experience.

8.42 In July 1998 the Minister for Health and Family Services launched the Northern Territory Remote Workforce Agency to administer incentives encouraging general practitioners to move to remote areas.[29] Given the need in these communities, such a scheme directed at setting up sequential audiology specialists in a remote area mobile practice for a contracted period of time warrants consideration.

8.43 The most readily available source of health care to many communities is the Aboriginal health workers. Therefore, the importance of their education and up to date training cannot be underestimated. Although acknowledging the limits of their training, it must be recognised that much of the detection, treatment and community education can be achieved by Aboriginal health workers.

8.44 Health workers involved with baby clinic check-ups and pre-schools must be adequately trained in screening for otitis media and hearing problems. Such early detection will short-circuit many learning difficulties in later life. This requires a funding commitment, both for expanding the numbers of health workers and for their continued training. Health workers must then be able to refer their clients to an accessible hearing specialist.

Hearing aids and amplification

8.45 Hearing aids can assist many children who have suffered permanent mild to moderate hearing loss. Obviously, their use is dependent upon access to professional audiological screening.

8.46 A number of schools visited by the Committee have employed the use of amplification in classrooms to assist children with fluctuating and mild hearing loss. Even non-hearing impaired children have benefited from classroom amplification. Although classroom amplification is of great assistance to many students, it is expensive especially in remote areas. Children, their families and communities need instruction in the use of hearing devices. This was illustrated by a case study detailing how a child was flown to the nearest town and given a bone conductor hearing aid. The child misunderstood its purpose and the teachers and family did not know how to

29 Media Release, Dr Michael Wooldridge, Department of Health and Family Services, 6 July 1998 http://www.health.gov.au/archive/mediarel/1998/mw14498.htm (September 1999)

operate it. Within a short time the child ceased using the hearing aid.[30] Access to a sufficient supply of batteries may also be an issue in remote locations.

Cough, spit, blow

8.47 It is sometimes said the simplest solutions are the most effective. In the case of otitis media, the Committee heard evidence that the 'cough, spit, blow' program was very successful in reducing the number of infections.[31] Teaching children the importance of expelling fluid build-up when they have a cold, is a simple and obvious step toward reducing the number of infections. Of all programs the Committee saw, this one is the least expensive and most easy to implement. Teachers could be made aware of these steps through its inclusion in teacher in-service and pre-service training and by articles in teaching journals. Through the training of Indigenous health workers, the program could then be promoted throughout communities.

Classroom strategies

8.48 Given the high incidence of otitis media hearing and learning problems in Indigenous children, it is vitally important that teachers and those in training be equipped with the skills to teach hearing impaired children. The high turnover of teachers in remote communities, means that it is essential that this training be offered regularly or included with schools' induction programs.

8.49 One suggestion which the Committee heard is to alert teachers to the possibility of fluctuating hearing loss is to place a blue dot besides each child's name on the role to alert, and remind, teachers of those children who are known to have re-occurrences of otitis media.[32] With this awareness, the teacher can then observe the child's behaviour and employ appropriate teaching strategies. The following are examples of educational strategies, which could be used to assist students with hearing disabilities.[33]

- The teacher should use simple language, and summarise and repeat information often.
- The non-verbal content of communication should be given greater importance. Aboriginal communities employ this communication method when dealing with hearing impaired children. They use lots of gestures and sign language and place great emphasis on facial expressions and intonations.

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30 Lowell, Anne, Budukulawuy, Gurimangu, Maypilama and Nyomba, "Communication and Learning in an Aboriginal School: The influence of Conductive Hearing Loss", *The Aboriginal Child at School*, volume 23 number 4 (1995), p. 5

31 Cairns West State School, Queensland, *Hansard Precis*, 2 August 1999, p. 4

32 Mr Desmond O'Malley, *Hansard*, Bourke, 26 July 1999, p. 73

33 In addition to evidence gathered by the Committee, most of the classroom strategy information has been drawn from Higgins, 1997, (Overview of Literature – Research and Programs) see

http://www.nexus.edu.au/TeachStud/arera/Otitis/Part2.html (September 1999)

- Students with fluctuating hearing loss should be encouraged to sit close to the teacher. The teacher could use extensive eye contact and call the child's name to get their attention before speaking. The teacher's face should be sufficiently well lit to enable lip reading if necessary, and the teacher should speak in a precise and clear manner. If high numbers of students are affected, the classroom layout may need to be rearranged. Alternatively, the use of small groups and individual instruction might be increased. Small groups allow the children to interact with each other assisting hearing, or SAE language, impaired children to watch other children's responses and non-verbal cues closely.

- Care should be taken in moving pupils with a hearing loss to another class or group. If it is imperative to move them, it is advisable also to move a child who understands their impediment and who is accustomed to assisting them.

- Streaming which concentrates students with hearing loss into lower ability groups should be avoided, since this inhibits student's use of valuable peer learning strategies.

- Classroom noise greatly adds to the difficulties of hearing impaired children. While it cannot be eliminated completely, factors like the addition of carpet squares on the floor, hangings on the walls, rubber stoppers on furniture may assist in reducing the overall noise level. Consideration should also be given to reducing other sources of noise such as air-conditioners.

8.50 In its literature survey the Committee noted a caution for teachers seeking to identify children with hearing-related problems.[34] This confirms the need for specific health issue training for teachers.

Urbanisation

8.51 Professor Ian Wronski spoke to the Committee in Townsville about the different levels of hearing among children from Indigenous communities and those from towns.[35] According to his experience, the impact of urbanisation – clean water, sewerage, better housing and nutrition – was a significant factor in the lower incidence of otitis media as well as other health issues among urban Aboriginal children.

8.52 Increased and on-going funding should be allocated to training Aboriginal health workers and equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify and work with children with hearing deficiencies. Incentives to promote a professional community health service similar to the Fred Hollows Trachoma model should be investigated. Although the Committee understands that health delivery to Indigenous people is a State responsibility, it encourages relevant Commonwealth ministers to pursue this issue through ministerial councils.

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34 Anne Lowell, Budukulawuy, Gurimangu, Maypilama and Nyomba, "Communication and Learning in an Aboriginal School: The influence of Conductive Hearing Loss", *The Aboriginal Child at School*, volume 23 number 4 (1995), pp 4-6

35 Professor Ian Wronski, *Hansard*, Townsville, 4 August 1999, pp. 226-228

Nutrition and hunger

8.53 Some would question whether issues like hunger are the responsibility of educators. It is, however, believed by many that due to its impact on children's education, their general well-being, including nutrition, must be addressed to enable effective education to occur. The Principal of Tauondi College in Port Adelaide summed up the importance of the link between health and education.

> In terms of a real focus, over the last three to four years we have encouraged local primary health care provider agencies ... to be on-site to support primary health care needs of students and community members who visit the college. We have the occasional planned clinics – health checks and nutritional promotional activities – to begin a process whereby students, community members and staff, for that matter, think about those issues that impact not only on themselves but their families. ...
>
> We are treading that fine line between being criticised for not being wholly and solely an educational institution and acknowledging that you cannot have education of anybody, black or white, young or old, if they are not sound of mind, body and spirit [36]

The incidence of malnutrition

8.54 A 1991 study estimated that twenty per cent of Aboriginal children aged two or younger were malnourished. Twelve per cent exhibited wasting and three per cent stunting of growth. Five per cent of the surveyed children were afflicted by both problems.[37] Similarly, a 1993 study reported twenty-two per cent of children suffering from malnutrition.[38] *Learning Lessons* recounted that the Territory Health Services recorded between 13 and 22 per cent of Indigenous Northern Territory children under five years were clinically underweight.[39]

8.55 Inadequate access to enough of the right food groups has contributed to the thirty-nine per cent of Indigenous school children with iron deficient anaemia.[40] The incidence of iron deficiency and anaemia has been reported in some locations at a higher levels. One Kimberley region study found seventy-two per cent of Aboriginal children under five years, and seventy-nine per cent of children aged five to fourteen

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36 Mr Bill Wilson, *Hansard*, Port Adelaide, 27 July 1999, pp. 147-148

37 Ruben AR, Walker AC, *Malnutrition among rural aboriginal children in the Top End of the Northern Territory*, Med J Australia, 1995, p.'s 162, 400-403, as quoted in Submission No. 35, National Aboriginal Community controlled Health Organisation, vol 5, p. 189

38 Paterson, Barbara; Ruben, Alan; Nossar, Victor 'School screening in remote Aboriginal communities – results of an evaluation', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol 22 no. 6, 1998

39 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 149

40 Paterson, 1998

were anaemic.[41] The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation submission reported that one third of Aboriginal people living in rural areas were concerned about having insufficient food.[42]

The impact of malnutrition

8.56 The effects of malnutrition begin before birth. Indigenous babies are more than twice as likely to be of low birthweight[43] which is commonly attributed to the health status of the mother. It has been reported that there is growing evidence that malnutrition during infancy can be linked to adult diseases such as diabetes and end stage renal disease.[44]Malnutrition in children effects their learning abilities and consequently limits their academic potential.

8.57 Malnourished children tend to be often tired, have low concentration levels and are prone to other illnesses. Poor nutrition is a contributing factor to the high absentee rates of Indigenous children. In addition, research has shown that the incidence of malnutrition on children under two years of age has a long-term impact on their brain development and academic potential. This once again highlights the importance of effective and early health care to education.

> In a study of 157 Aboriginal children aged under two years who were admitted with diarrhoea to Royal Darwin Hospital between May 1990 and April 1991, wasting (an indicator of malnutrition) was found to be significantly associated with microcephaly (small head circumference). The authors recommended that there be an emphasis on improved nutrition during pregnancy, lactation and infancy. These periods were seen as critical for the healthy brain development of children, ***with long-term consequences for intelligence and cognitive functioning***.[45]

Contributing factors to malnutrition

8.58 Malnutrition has been consistently linked to poverty. The weight of scientific evidence supports a socioeconomic explanation of health inequalities. This traces the roots of ill health to such determinants as income, education and employment as well

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41 Hopkins, R et al, "The prevalence of hookworm infection, iron deficiency and anaemia in an Aboriginal community in north-west Australia", *Medical Journal of Australia*, volume 166 3, March 1997, pp. 241-244

42 Madden R, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey,1994 as quoted in Submission No. 35, National Aboriginal Community controlled Health Organisation, vol 5, p. 194

43 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Clearinghouse (1999). *Summary of Indigenous health status, 1999*. http://www.cowan.edu.au/clearinghouse/summary99.htm [September 1999]

44 Rose Ellis and Donnaleen Campbell, The National Nutrition Networks Conference – Sharing Good Stories, *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal 1998*, Jan/Feb, see

http://www.indiginet.com.au/journal/national_nutrition_network.htm [September 1999]

45 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4704.0, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, 1999, p. 50; Source: Skull, Ruben and Walker 1997. (Emphasis added)

as to the material environment and lifestyle.[46] A 1998 report in the United Kingdom found that economically disadvantaged people eat less healthily partly because of the cost of food. Foods richer in energy, high in fat and sugar were cheaper per unit of energy than foods rich in protective nutrients.[47]

8.59 The remoteness of location also contributes to the limited variety of available food with particular shortages in vital fresh foods. Many stores are now community controlled and some have taken a very pro-active stance in regard to nutrition. Some have reduced the amount and variety of unhealthy foods and increased the supply of healthy foods. Certain stores have implemented 'sampling' days to expose the community to a wider and healthier range of food.

8.60 The possibility for remote communities to grow their own fresh foods is somewhat limited by unfortunate recollections of enforced labour in mission gardens in years past. Their culture of hunting and gathering has not pre-disposed Indigenous people towards agricultural pursuits. Some areas, however, have utilised permaculture to improve environmental health aspects of their communities including the growing of appropriate foods. Permaculture consists of growing trees, vines, and groundcovers to reduce dust levels and provide shade as well as some nutritional foods suitable for production in hot dry conditions. The Uwankara Palyanku Kanyintjaku (UPK) Report, a joint publication of Nganampa Health, the South Australian Health Commission, and the Aboriginal Health Organisations of South Australia, is an important resource for educators interested in arid zone environmental health issues.

8.61 The impact of poverty on diet for many Indigenous communities has been compounded by the fact that food prices in remote towns have consistently been shown to be double that of major cities.[48] Given the high incidence of poverty in Indigenous communities, it is not difficult to believe that there is a link between high prices and poor diet resulting in a high percentage of malnourished children in Indigenous communities.

8.62 As mentioned above, the health status of the mother can seriously effect her children. Pregnant Indigenous women often have inadequate diets and lead an inactive lifestyle. Indigenous children tend often to have a low birth weight, itself an indicator of future health problems. While they are breast-feeding their growth rates are comparable to non-Indigenous children. Once they commence solid feeding, however, there is a comparative decline in their growth rates. A low growth rate has been linked with an increase in early childhood illnesses. Should malnutrition problems continue

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46 Acheson, 1998; http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/doh/ih/synopsis.htm (September 1999)

47 Acheson, 1998; http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/doh/ih/part2d.htm (September 1999)

48 Sullivan Hansard, Gracey M, Hervon V, *Food costs and nutrition in remote areas of Northern Australian*, Med J Australia, 1987, p. 147, as quoted in Submission no. 35, National Aboriginal Community controlled Health Organisation, vol 5, p. 189

the child is prone to other illnesses potentially leading to regular absences from school.

Possible effective solutions

Breakfast/lunch programs

8.63 Several locations visited by the Committee have recognised that children have demonstrated learning disabilities caused by lack of regular meals. If a child is hungry they will have difficulty concentrating and will often get sleepy during class. Many of these locations have implemented nutrition programs.

8.64 At Cairns West Primary School lunch and afternoon tea is available every day and the program is monitored so a family worker can be notified if it becomes obvious that a child is not receiving regular meals.[49] St Ignatius Primary School in Bourke provides a breakfast program and also employs a school nurse for half of each day.[50] Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College in Alice Springs provides transport to and from school, breakfast programs, school uniforms and hygiene opportunities for children coming from communities.[51]

8.65 The provision of private funding allowed East Kalgoorlie Primary School to build what is known as the Henderson Centre next door to the school. Through government funding this Centre is staffed to enable teachers to refer students with special needs. Students can have breakfast or a shower, or visit the school nurse before returning to the classroom in a more 'learning ready' state.[52]

8.66 The provision of free, nutritionally balanced meals can be a vital component in the diet of children from disadvantaged families. A national, school-health nutrition strategy would benefit all economically disadvantaged children regardless of their race.

8.67 Some would argue that state provision of nutritional food diminishes parents' sense of responsibility. The counter argument is that the state has a responsibility to ensure the future well-being of people who are unable to look after themselves. If a child is being disadvantaged by a parent's inability to provide a adequate and regular food supply, the Committee believes it to be the schools' responsibility to address that need to enable the child to achieve the optimal benefit from their educational opportunities.

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49 Cairns West Primary School, *Hansard Precis*, Cairns, 2 August 1999, p. 4

50 Brother Mark Fordyce, *Hansard*, Bourke, 26 July 1999, p. 68

51 Brother Paul Gilchrist, *Hansard*, Alice Springs, 6 August 1999, pp 254-255

52 Site visit, Hendersen Centre, Kalgoorlie, 14 September 1999

Educational strategies

8.68 The Acheson *Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health Report* in the United Kingdom, and the World Health Organisation have both recommended that health education programs seek to address preventive health issues in school aged children.[53] Such a program should include information about the nutritional value of food and its effects, budgeting for food, and the nutritionally best way to prepare and cook it.[54]

8.69 The Acheson inquiry looked at the problems economically disadvantaged families have. Many of the issues examined are applicable to Australian Indigenous peoples. The Acheson inquiry recommended a broad interdepartmental policy approach as many issues, such as health and education, are interrelated. Three of the Report's recommendations specific to nutrition and education are reproduced below.

> We recommend further measures to improve the nutrition provided at school, including: the promotion of school food policies; the development of budgeting and cooking skills; the preservation of free school meals entitlement [in England, children from economically disadvantaged groups receive a free school lunch]; the provision of free school fruit; and the restriction of less healthy food.
>
> We recommend policies, which will increase the availability and accessibility of food stuffs to supply an adequate and affordable diet. Specifically:
>
> We recommend the further development of policies, which will ensure adequate retail provision of food to those who are disadvantaged.[55]

8.70 For any Indigenous educational program to succeed it will need to gain the support of the local community. The importance of Indigenous participation in designing and implementing programs has been stated consistently since the *Report into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* and is integral to self determination.

8.71 The importance of the role of Indigenous health workers cannot be overstated. They are the people most likely to identify health problems at an early stage. Their role in educating parents within the community on health issues is also important.

8.72 The National Nutrition Networks Conference in 1997 was conducted around the theme 'sharing good stories'. Following are some accounts of community level

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53 Submission No. 35, National Aboriginal Community controlled Health Organisation, vol 5, p. 194

54 Acheson, 1998; http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/doh/ih/part2d.htm (September 1999)

55 Acheson, 1998, as quoted in Submission No. 35, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, vol 5, p. 186

projects that were successful in raising health and nutrition levels for Indigenous people.[56]

8.73 The Northern Territory 'Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture' program emphasises the importance of the link between a pregnant mother's health status and that of her child. The Nganampa Health Council run a Nutrition Awareness Project for young mothers and babies. The project provides information, resource materials and conducts workshops for nutrition education across an area of 350,000 square kilometers.

8.74 The Looma aboriginal community involve the community store, the Town Council, CDEP, health workers and the school in their diabetes project. The community store stocks healthy food and the staff are trained to assist customers in their choices. They assist in educating the community by hosting food tastings and 'shelf talks' – signs placed on the shelves to inform customers of the nutritional value of various foods. The school provides lessons on health and nutrition in conjunction with sport opportunities and conducts iron man and woman competitions to promote exercise.

8.75 At Halls Creek, Western Australia, a Failure to Thrive Committee was formed to identify children at risk and to offer education in regard to nutrition. They also produced an educational video for parents on preventing failure to thrive and on introducing solid foods to babies' diets.

Recommendation 28

8.76 The Committee recommends that more funding be targeted towards flexible community development and self-management schemes aimed at improving standards of health in Indigenous communities.

Conclusion

8.77 There is overwhelming evidence that health problems seriously effect the education of many Indigenous children. The solution to this problem is, unfortunately, not as clear as the evidence it presents.

8.78 Nonetheless, some strategies are meeting with varying degrees of success in dealing with health problems. The most basic and obvious steps would appear to be the most promising. Those steps are:

- increasing awareness and skills of teachers in understanding and identifying health issues that impact upon education;

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56 Rose Ellis and Donnaleen Campbell, The National Nutrition Networks Conference – Sharing Good Stories, *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal 1998*, Jan/Feb, see also http://www.indiginet.com.au/journal/national_nutrition_network.htm [September 1999]

- increasing the number and quality of training of Aboriginal health workers, given how crucial Indigenous involvement is in the provision of health services;
- providing community health education programs;
- increasing Indigenous access to specialist services;
- continuing to take steps to reduce Indigenous poverty; and
- implementing policies which support the provision of school based health education and the provision of an adequate variety of reasonably priced nutritional food.

8.79 The Queensland Teachers' Union submission highlighted the critical importance of training existing and pre-service teachers to be able to recognise symptoms of health problems that will affect students' learning ability.[57] This training should include warning signs for malnutrition, abuse, learning difficulties, diabetes, otitis media, and substance abuse, as well as appropriate referral methods and knowledge of available resources for preventative, promotive and corrective health care.

8.80 *Learning Lessons* makes the point that Education Departments, as the main purchaser of services from tertiary institutions, should be able to nominate certain skill sets they consider necessary for their teachers.[58] In the context of this chapter, the Committee considers that Indigenous culture, English as a second language, and basic training in identifying pediatric illnesses which will affect students' ability to learn, should be included in all teacher training curriculums. Chapter six of this report includes a recommendation on teacher training.

8.81 The transient lifestyle of many Indigenous people groups adds a further challenge to educators pursuing a holistic program. The Committee saw an example of best practice in dealing with this problem at Kalgoorlie and Geraldton.[59] Both these centres have created a tracking program to enable teachers to access transient student profiles with relevant medical histories that can be accessed on-line.

8.82 Such longstanding and complex problems will never be solved by a single program. They require a whole-of-government, and cross-departmental effort, accompanied by a continuing commitment to turn the tide. In the last decade there have been substantial improvements in the health status of many Indigenous school aged children. The Committee wishes to point to some of these successes and encourage those working for improved health in Indigenous communities to keep pressing forward.

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57 Submission No. 22, Queensland Teachers' Union, vol. 2, p. 92

58 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 83

59 Site visits, Kalgoorlie and Geraldton, WA, 13 and 14 September 1999

Recommendation 29

8.83 The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Ministers and state governments undertake immediate action through ministerial councils to coordinate programs to improve community health, including:

- **identifying linkages between education and health care initiatives;**
- **providing maternal, baby and early childhood health care;**
- **teacher education to identify and deal with hearing impairments and other health issues in the classroom;**
- **accelerating the training of more community health workers in Indigenous communities;**
- **improving Indigenous access to specialist services and community health education programs;**
- **encouragement of community efforts to improve nutritional standards through education and community purchasing and cultivation initiatives; and**
- **improving provision of school based health education.**

CHAPTER 9

DIVERSITY

9.1 Most of the reviews and inquiries into Indigenous education over the last ten years have drawn attention to the diverse nature of Indigenous communities, and the need to take this into account in policy making. This diversity exists in cultural, social and geographic terms. The NATSIEP joint policy statement referred to diversity in the following way. 'In the pursuit of educational equity, the National Policy recognises the diversity that exists in terms of Aboriginal socio-economic circumstances, cultural values and educational aspirations. These environmental factors have to be taken into account in the design and delivery of educational services and in assessments of individual and student group performance.'[1] The agreed common goals of the national policy aimed to provide a framework that would 'encourage flexibility and innovation'.[2]

9.2 The national review of Indigenous education also documented support for 'a more diverse and pluralistic view of how best to provide and administer education'.[3] Recommendation two of the review called for policy making to be based on five principles. One of these was diversity, which was about 'empowering Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders to exercise the maximum degree of choice in education'.[4] The more outcomes focussed MCEETYA National Strategy did not specifically address diversity but acknowledged it in priority one, which pointed to a need for reform in the delivery of education and training programs to recognise diversity.[5]

Remote, rural and urban Indigenous needs

9.3 Indigenous cultural diversity is directly linked to a richness and variety in location. 'Despite an inclusive commonality of Aboriginal identity, key differences continue to be asserted by groups wanting to emphasise distinctive local identities.'[6] The culture of educational administration in Australia shows a propensity to favour standardisation, even though this flies in the face of educational theory. The challenge

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1 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1989, pp. 9-10

2 *ibid.*, p. 13

3 Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1995, p. 21

4 *ibid.*, p. 27

5 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996 – 2002*, DEETYA, Canberra, 1995

6 D. Smith, *Shooting the Banker: Essays on ATSIC and Self-Determination*, North Australia Research Unit, Darwin, 1996, p. 18

in improving Indigenous education lies in the need to serve widely diverse groups at very different levels of readiness to benefit from educational opportunities. It lies also in the way governments choose to administer schools in catering for these varying levels.

9.4 Indigenous diversity encompasses remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settlements, rural towns, and urban and metropolitan areas. Historical factors contribute to cultural diversity, especially in relation to the degree of dispossession from land, and the impact of successive government policies since white settlement. Within these three main categories of remote, rural and urban there are other styles of communities, including inland and coastal settlements, town camps, small outstations or homelands, pastoral excisions, and fringe camps. Some groups are highly mobile, often in predictable ways.

9.5 The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses the following census categories to define geographic location:

- Rural balance (settlements under 200 people)
- Bounded localities (settlements of between 200 – 999 people)
- Other urban (towns of between 1,000 – 99,999 people)
- Major urban (cities of 100,000 and above people)

9.6 Most 'remote' settlements come within the scope of the first two categories;, while 'rural' roughly equates with 'other urban', and 'urban' (metropolitan) would be 'major urban'. Remote Indigenous people comprise the smallest percentage group overall, but usually present the most challenges, geographically and in terms of cultural appropriateness, for developing and implementing policies, particularly national policies such as education.

9.7 In the 1996 census, the Indigenous population was estimated at 386,049 persons or 2.1 per cent of the total population of Australia. Around 30 per cent of the Indigenous population lived in major urban areas, while 42 per cent lived in other urban areas, 11 per cent lived in bounded localities, and 17 per cent lived in the rural balance section of state. This geographic distribution differed across states and territories.[7] Over half of all Indigenous people resided in New South Wales and Queensland (28 per cent and 27 per cent respectively). Another quarter lived in Western Australia and the Northern Territory (15 per cent and 13 per cent respectively). Overall, Indigenous people represented 3.2 per cent or less of the total

7 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, ABS, Canberra, 1996, p. 5

population in each State or Territory, except in the Northern Territory where representation was 28.5 per cent.[8]

9.8 Census figures are important for purposes of perspective, but need to be treated with caution. These demographics are also affected by differences in age. Compared to the rest of Australia, a higher proportion of Indigenous people were aged under 15 in 1996 (40 per cent compared to 21 per cent) while a lower proportion were aged over 65 (3 per cent compared to 12 per cent), indicating high fertility and mortality. The median age for Indigenous people was 20 years compared to 34 years for other Australians. Almost 90 per cent of Indigenous people identified as Aboriginal, while 8 per cent identified as Torres Strait Islander and 3 per cent identified as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. As a consequence of cultural diversity, differences exist in relationships, links with the land, language, occupations, class and gender.[9] This diversity of community types also includes further differences in socio-economic status, cultural beliefs and values. The implications of this diversity are that generalisations about the extent of problems faced by the Indigenous population are not always valid; and that universal solutions or programs in Aboriginal education and training will not work.[10]

9.9 Like cultures everywhere, Indigenous cultures are dynamic. The past impacts on the present, and influences the future shape and evolution of culture. These underlying issues of diversity need to be kept in mind as the differing educational needs of remote, rural and urban Indigenous people are explored.

> We are all influenced by our history. Our present situation, our motivation and our outlook are strongly influenced by the past. Without an understanding of what has gone before, we are prone to misunderstand the reasons why people think and behave as they do. In the case of Indigenous students in school, the historical influences on their present situation have continued to pervade their lives. We are all familiar with the children of the Stolen Generation and the ongoing debate over Land Rights. However, too few people understand the relevance of the historical processes to the lives of Indigenous people. A history of dispossession, oppression and racism has been instrumental in shaping their lives and constricting their opportunities.[11]

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8 *ibid.*, p. 2

9 Gary Partington ed., *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanded Education*, Social Science Press, Katoomba, 1998, p. 2

10 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, *A Chance for the Future*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, pp. 3-4

11 Gary Partington ed., *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, Social Science Press, Katoomba, 1998, p. 1

9.10 Around 23 per cent of the total Indigenous population live in communities of 1,000 or fewer people.[12] They include many outstations and homelands in the Northern Territory, parts of Western Australia, Queensland, and South Australia.

9.11 The provision of services and infrastructure in such circumstances is extremely difficult. The Committee did not visit an outstation or homeland, but the difficulty of providing education to such communities was mentioned in submissions and source documents. Limited or no access to formal schooling for compulsory age students is more prevalent in these very remote circumstances. Currently teachers do not usually reside in homelands, but visit them regularly, sometimes distributing food and acting as a conduit to the main centre servicing a number of homelands.

9.12 While homeland communities generally place a high priority on education, its appropriateness and delivery 'raises a dilemma between the rights of Aboriginal people to retain their identity and associated lifestyle, and the obligation of State and Territory governments to provide schooling to all children.'[13] It has been noted that some remote communities may have less commitment than urban communities to the value of acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills. This is not to suggest that they regard education as unimportant. They do not perceive, however, that a European education is urgently needed to live a fulfilling life; 'indeed, there is much evidence to the contrary, particularly in the homeland centres'.[14]

9.13 Apart from devising programs that are in accord with the aspirations of the community, providing educational programs to outstations and homelands presents a number of resourcing, logistical and operational problems for service providers, not to mention the inhabitants themselves. For example, in the Northern Territory, obtaining a primary school educational service in a homeland is dependent upon the community meeting certain criteria. The community needs to identify, enrol and guarantee the attendance of at least twelve students, and identify and support an Assistant Teacher, who must enrol in a teacher education program. Homelands may also be asked to provide a building for the program. A qualified visiting teacher, usually non-Indigenous, visits the homeland regularly by car, boat or aeroplane, depending on the location. Most educational services are attached to a "hub" school. To meet these criteria, it is clear that people would need to reside permanently in their homeland. More mobile homeland communities need to rely on a sporadic education provision, when visiting bigger centres.

9.14 The diversity of outstations and homelands and their different size, location, level of resources and infrastructure ensure that each has a variety of needs and

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12 www.abs.gov.au, Australia Now – A Statistical Profile, Special Article, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: A statistical profile from the 1996 Census*, p. 4

13 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, *A Chance for the Future*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, p. 38

14 R G Schwab, *Educational 'failure' and educational 'success' in an Aboriginal community*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Discussion Paper No. 161/1998, Canberra, 1998, p. 15

aspirations. This reinforces the need for policy flexibility, and for an integrated community development approach unique to each community.

9.15 The mobility of remote Indigenous students, families and communities has impacted dramatically on access, participation, attendance, and outcomes in education. Mobility also affects non-Indigenous educators' perceptions and expectations of students and their families, often in a negative way. Mobility has, however, been an integral feature of Indigenous life for some time, and will continue.

> Aboriginal people or families move between a range of residential situations, such as between Aboriginal townships, homeland centres and white-populated urban areas. This mobility is not haphazard. It is influenced by seasonal, kinship and ceremonial commitments and is usually within a particular geographical region.[15]

9.16 Apart from instances of random life circumstance, most mobility is predictable. The Committee believes it should be investigated, anticipated, and catered for. In Western Australia, the Department of Education is dealing with problems associated with mobility in remote areas. There is a growing realisation that governments cannot impose a more sedentary lifestyle on Indigenous communities and that more innovative ways have to be found to ensure that students do not miss out on schooling. Tracking students' progress already occurs in some locations and appears to be a way of dealing with mobile students. Exploring the provision of an educational service that has the capacity to address mobility is a challenge. The Committee welcomes the initiatives undertaken in Western Australia and New South Wales (described in more detail in chapters three and four).

9.17 *Learning Lessons* describes in detail the Northern Territory Health Services recent initiatives in tracking patients using the Community Care Information System (CCIS) and outlines the system's coordination capacity, which has benefits for service delivery and cost effectiveness. The report recommends that the Northern Territory Department of Education 'consider the cost effectiveness of the CCIS and the potential for linking it with mandated school-based student tracking systems.'[16]

Recommendation 30

9.18 The Committee recommends that MYCEETA look at the Northern Territory Community Care Information System's potential for other parts of Australia.

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15 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, *A Chance for the Future*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, p. 4

16 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 147

Papunya

9.19 The Committee visited two remote settlements in the Northern Territory during this inquiry. One of these was Papunya, west of Alice Springs, where the Community Council and school staff have formed a strategic alliance. The Anangu Tjuta Nintirrikupayi Aboriginal Corporation (ATNAC) has been incorporated especially to look at the education of all people in the settlement. Disenchantment with the Department of Education, extending back to 1992, and a determination to deal directly with appropriate providers and arrange courses were part of the rationale for ATNAC's formation.[17]

9.20 The reasons for the disagreement between the community and the Northern Territory government, partly to do with electricity charges, need not be detailed here. Enrolments dropped to 18 pupils from about 180. Part of the problem was the posting of a school principal to Papunya who appeared to be out of sympathy with the community's expectations of the school program. The fall in enrolments was followed by a deliberate neglect of the school by the Northern Territory Department of Education official responsible for the region. As a result, public works department maintenance officials failed to carry out essential work on the school buildings and electricity and associated facilities. The Committee found the situation at Papunya a matter of concern. The school was run down, with heating equipment breaking down on the day of the visit. The appointment of a new principal concerned to rebuild relations with the community had seen enrolments increase to almost pre-1992 levels of 180 pupils, but the poor state of the school indicated that departmental attitudes remained unchanged.

9.21 The Committee questioned officials of the Northern Territory Education Department about the conditions at Papunya School in Alice Springs the day following the visit. In response, the Department outlined the Principal's role in requesting repairs and maintenance and minor new works. Of eight submissions for minor new works, seven had been returned to the school, unactioned, by the area Group School Management Council because of inattention to submission guidelines and requirements. The Department of Education referred to the need for a cooperative relationship between the Principal and the Group School Management Council and advised that assistance was available to complete these formalities.[18] The Committee did not consider this response to be convincing, as evidence from other representatives stressed that two departmental officers visit all bush schools once a year to assess repairs and maintenance needs, and proposals for minor new works. It is inconceivable that the Department knew nothing of the poor state of facilities at Papunya. Nor did the Department's response deal with the wilful negligence of senior Departmental officials.

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17 Submission No. 26, Papunya Community Council, vol. 2, pp. 196-197

18 Mr R Harvey, Northern Territory Department of Education, supplementary letter, 1 October 1999

9.22 It is a matter of interest to the Committee that since its visit, the record of the Papunya school in developing good practice in community involvement has been cited for special mention in the report *Learning Lessons*.[19] As the Committee observed, the Papunya story could be viewed as a nine-year political struggle for community control over education.

Yuendumu

9.23 The Committee visited a settlement of similar size, also west of Alice Springs, and saw a very different school. The dramatic stand-off between the government and the local community that caused problems for Papunya were not experienced here. The Committee learned much about the problems facing remote community schools during this visit.

9.24 To begin with the Committee was advised that funding of schools was often poorly targeted. The current emphasis is on resource development and administration. Much more beneficial would be a reallocation of funds into staffing so that the benefits could be delivered to students. The Committee inferred from this that current funding arrangements support the positions of central administrators. It was put to the Committee that principals and teachers are in a better position to understand problems than the administrators in Darwin and Alice Springs. As it is, the Yuendumu principal bends the rules to spend IESIP funds for additional AIEWs, the best possible use of this valuable source of funding. CDEP funds are used for the same purpose. Funding application processes are not user friendly, however, with too many layers of administration for principals to have to deal with. Funding programs also assume a homogeneous target group, and Indigenous people are not homogeneous.

9.25 At the social level, Yuendumu suffers the same problems as most Indigenous communities, although 'problem' youth are in a small minority. The Committee visited the community on the day when social welfare payments were made, so the township was very quiet. As the Principal stated, 'Most of the young men drive into Alice Springs to buy grog and return to disrupt their families'. It was a serious problem for children growing up accustomed to so much welfare dependency. Gambling was seen by young Indigenous people to be a way to economic advancement.

Remote Secondary or Post Primary Education

9.26 Secondary education presents unique problems in remote areas. One submission argues that an examination of the availability of suitable education programs for this group needs to be undertaken urgently. The submission cites a study done in the Northern Territory in 1993 that identified 41 per cent of teenagers as being

19 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, p. 175

outside any educational program. Of the 409 identified, 113 were still of compulsory school age.[20]

9.27 It is also argued that the Northern Territory Department of Education has been inconsistent in its delivery of education and training models to this group, even when particular approaches have been shown to be successful.

> In the Territory there has been two major remakes of this area of educational delivery in the past ten years. One was the shift from TAFE funded adult educators to the NT Open College structure. The other was the dismemberment of the Open College and the creation of the Northern Territory Employment Education and Training Authority. Each change has swept away productive and unproductive arrangements alike. Morale at the community level has been eroded as programs in which people had invested energy and trust were discontinued.[21]

9.28 For adolescent boys, initiation often precludes a continuing association with school, which is seen an institution for children. Many adolescent girls have family responsibilities. Those who continue their education away from their communities:

> ... find the going extremely difficult because of home sickness, wrong sexual liaisons, and conflicts with students from other areas. In addition, the students are away at a crucial time in their induction to traditional knowledge and status within the community.[22]

9.29 Another submission asserts that the majority of secondary-aged Indigenous students living in the Northern Territory are not enrolled in formal secondary educational programs with recognised qualifications that translate into pathways to further education or employment. Where access to secondary education is available, it is through Community Education Centres (CECs) which provide an alternative to secondary education. Primary school teachers usually staff these centres. According to this submission, '... this systemic disadvantage at the level of secondary education needs urgent attention, preferably at the level of a Royal Commission into Indigenous education'.[23]

9.30 There have been some attempts to overcome the jurisdictional problems associated with mobility across state borders. Education officials from Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland have met, under a tri-state agreement, to discuss issues relating to the needs of border inhabitants. In Western Australia, this arrangement has resulted in an experimental approach to secondary program delivery in remote areas. Two Aboriginal traineeships in small business, a travelling disco, a clothesline manufacturing and erection enterprise, and an 'Op' shop

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20 Submission No. 4, Mr Peter Toyne MLA, vol. 1, p. 21

21 *ibid.*, p. 25

22 *ibid.*, p. 22

23 Submission No. 12, Dr Christine Nicholls, vol. 1, p. 137

are examples of this approach, which involves and engages students directly. An evaluation will be conducted by the Central Queensland University early in 2000.[24]

9.31 Although a small percentage of the overall Indigenous population live in remote areas, this 'remote' factor accounts for a much larger percentage of the Indigenous population in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The provision of education in such circumstances is labour and resource intensive, and presents endemic problems for education providers and Indigenous communities alike. Outcomes and attendance are affected by health, nutrition, housing, socio-economic factors, teacher preparedness, the provision of appropriate teachers both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and culturally appropriate curriculum issues which may be linked to an aspiration for wider community development.

9.32 Most remote schools have a predominantly Indigenous student body. The Committee believes that strong community leadership and direction is important in developing a resilient community able to maximise opportunities for self-determination in the school and wider community. The Committee saw first-hand examples of the involvement of Indigenous elders in school affairs, and of strong partnerships between Indigenous and non Indigenous school staff which integrated other community services, especially those affecting health. Where aspirations for community involvement are pronounced, it is important that they be actively and appropriately supported. The provision of community development and management training on site is one way to provide such support. Thus, adult education has a vital role to play:

> It is essential to acknowledge that educational levels across the whole community need to be addressed if communities are going to be able to grow and develop.[25]

9.33 The Committee encourages partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators. Where this is accompanied by a long term aspiration to Aboriginalise staff in both the school and other community services, non-Indigenous staff should acquire an appreciation for and develop skills in community development and empowerment techniques.

9.34 The issues of autonomy and self-determination have wider relevance to education. As referred to in para. 2.38, education may be regarded as a 'social resource'; as a process through which a community comes to understand what it values and to determine how community aspirations are to be achieved. Education therefore cannot be seen only as a service to be provided by a remote government through bureaucratic processes. Even matters like routine building maintenance, something many communities and schools will happily delegate to distant agencies,

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24 Site Visit, Kalgoorlie. Meeting with Regional Office staff.

25 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 112

may be regarded by Indigenous communities as a responsibility to be undertaken at a local level. It may also be more efficient to undertake such tasks at a local level.

Recommendation 31

9.35 The Committee recommends that responsibility for school programs and overall administration be devolved to school communities where appropriate; that this include financial self-management; and that assistance be given to local communities in developing a culture of management accountability for decisions made in their name.

Torres Strait Islands

9.36 The Committee visited the Torres Strait Islands, discussing educational issues with school administrators on Thursday Island and visiting the school at Badu Island. During the visit to Badu Island, one of 14 outlying islands in the Torres Strait, the Committee was informed of a number of problems faced by remote communities. It was also told of the successful efforts of the parent liaison officer, one of the local elders, in contributing to good links between school and community, and particularly in ensuring good attendance. There were said to be only 'pockets' of non-attendees. Fundraising for the school was a highly successful social activity for the whole community. The CDEP was the means by which employment in seasonal industries such as crayfishing and pearling was provided for. Of more relevance for this report, the CDEP also provided for the employment and training of Indigenous teachers aides over and above normal staff allocations.

9.37 Despite improvements, literacy levels were still substantially behind those on the mainland, and the school struggled to find the right direction in literacy teaching. Even though English is a second language for all inhabitants of Badu Island, there was no qualified ESL teacher on the school staff. Lack of accommodation was an obstacle to recruiting qualified teachers. One ESL advisory teacher served the district. Teachers did their best with transition from Kriol to standard English. There was no LOTE program. Literacy problems were particularly acute for Year 7 students going south for secondary education. Only a small percentage overcame language problems sufficiently well to enable them to continue their studies through secondary school.

9.38 Providing secondary education to scattered populations separated by stretches of water brings its own problems, notably the cost of transport. Commuting is not an option because of the high cost of flying and the absence of suitable water transport The use of private dinghies is prevalent, but fast water transport is subject to the vagaries of weather and sea conditions.

9.39 Apart from this practical difficulty, parents anxious to have their children continue secondary education sometimes bypass Thursday Island High School in favour of boarding schools on the mainland. Abstudy assists them in this choice. Central to this choice is a belief that their children have a better chance of learning English in mainstream (mainland) schools. There are also perceived problems with boarding arrangements at Thursday Island, specifically a lack of accommodation at

the beginning of each year. As students drop out beds become available, but by then other students have made their own arrangements away from Thursday Island.[26]

9.40 The Committee also heard the views of the Deputy Principal of the Thursday Island High School on a range of issues. Vocational education was seen as a promising way of keeping students at school longer, especially boys, and efforts were being made to enlist the support of local businesses in providing incentives to improve attendance and student achievement. Thursday Island High School suffers the endemic problem of high staff turnover, a particular disadvantage in a predominantly Indigenous school where building personal trust is important. The high staff turnover was also an impediment to running a successful vocational education program. The Queensland Education Department provides no advantageous staffing formula for schools with predominantly Indigenous students, so class sizes of 23 to 25 can be reduced only by eliminating subjects from the curriculum.

9.41 Martin Nakata, a Torres Strait Islander academic, reflects the aspirations expressed in the Badu Island site visit. He argues strongly for the pursuit of a Western type education focusing on English acquisition and related skills, and links this to Islanders appropriating a better economic and political position for themselves in the future - literally, the ability to 'cut a better deal'.[27] Nakata advocates the development of location specific and effective English language and literacy pedagogies rather than transposing models, such as bilingual education, from other contexts[28].

9.42 In light of the educational challenges outlined by witnesses from the Torres Strait Islands, the Committee is sympathetic to Nakata's point of view. The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) is unique in Indigenous governance, leading the way in the Commonwealth's advocacy of increased regional autonomy. The Committee believes that the Authority is in a strong position to influence the Commonwealth and the Queensland Government to develop a strategic plan that addresses the education and training concerns and aspirations of the people of the Torres Strait.

Differing rural needs

9.43 The ABS Census category 'other urban' relates to townships that range in size from 1,000 to 99,999 people. Around 42 per cent of Indigenous Australians live in centres of this size.[29] Some remote Indigenous communities fall into this category, although not many. Most rural townships and regional centres fall into this category but differences in size, location, and proportion of Indigenous population result in a

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26 Site visit Thursday Island

27 Martin Nakata, 'Cutting a Better Deal for Torres Strait Islanders', *The Aboriginal Child at School*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1995, p. 20

28 *ibid.*, p. 25

29 www.abs.gov.au, Australia Now – A Statistical Profile, Special Article, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: A statistical profile from the 1996 Census*, p. 4

diversity of circumstances. Generally, a major difference in such communities is that Indigenous people form a minority within a dominant culture. Large centres such as Cairns, Alice Springs and Geraldton often have a sizeable Indigenous minority (6 per cent; 12 per cent; and 7 per cent respectively). In some smaller towns like Tennant Creek and Brewarrina, Indigenous people comprise nearly half the total population (40 per cent and 55 per cent respectively). For schools in these towns, the Indigenous student body usually reflects the general population, although there are exceptions.

9.44 The challenges facing mainstream schools catering to a minority of Indigenous students are considerable. The Committee found that successful outcomes were more likely to be achieved where an integrated local strategy towards Indigenous education existed at the school level, replicating statewide strategic plans to implement the NATSIEP. Crucial features of such local strategies included the principals' commitment and leadership, the valuing of Indigenous identity in a variety of ways (including consultation and negotiation with Indigenous parents), expectations and support of students being evident, appropriate pedagogy and materials being employed, and student progress being evaluated regularly.

> There are an increasing number of schools that are providing an education that is genuinely responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These schools are characterised by staff committed to meeting the social, emotional and educational needs of Indigenous students. It usually begins with the principal and a high level of support from Indigenous families and educational networks strengthens it.[30]

9.45 The Committee also heard repeatedly that regular student attendance is critical, with the employment of Indigenous role models contributing significantly to the retention of students. In many of the mainstream primary schools the Committee visited, there was evidence that one or more of the factors outlined above were addressed. However, it was rare to find them all operating simultaneously, in a strategic and systematic framework. The Committee also noted many negative comments from non-Indigenous educators and parents about the perceived inequity of resource allocation to Indigenous students, as opposed to non-Indigenous students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This was particularly evident in rural and regional Australia.

9.46 The Committee visited several towns and heard evidence that suggests successful educational outcomes result from particular approaches, practices, and models. In some cases, the successful outcomes fell outside the parameters of those stated in official policy documents, but were socially and culturally worthwhile. In others, the successful outcome was that students went on to further educational experiences. This suggests that a more flexible approach to performance indicators may be warranted, especially where the community is able to articulate specific qualitative indices. The Committee also gained an appreciation of the complexity of

30 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 133

some of the issues which face schools in both delivering appropriate programs to a cross cultural student body, and achieving outcomes identified by official policy. They also heard some of the reasons for non-attendance, and why Western education systems often fail Indigenous students. The following case studies come from evidence given in submissions, and at hearings and site visits. They illustrate a diversity of circumstances, needs and aspirations, and a variety of responses.

Geraldton

9.47 The Committee visited three schools and a TAFE institution in Geraldton. One was the only pre-school visited during the inquiry. When the Committee visited Meekawaya Aboriginal Pre-School they were struck by the similarity in physical appearance to any other well-run mainstream pre-school. Catering to an establishment of 40 children, Meekawaya has been run by Indigenous parents for 25 years and differs in philosophy and emphasis in ways that are important to the Indigenous parents who choose to send their children there. Control of decision-making, an emphasis on Indigenous identity (Wajarri language and culture), attention to specific health issues which affect learning and the provision of transport all contribute to the achievement of 74 per cent attendance. Their target is 75 per cent. Although funded by the Department of Family and Children's Services, staff have always been employed by the Department of Education. Funding arrangements for community pre-schools in Western Australia are due to change next year, when the Department of Education will assume responsibility for funding. Staff outlined the benefits of a culturally appropriate curriculum and approach as starting children's education off well. During the course of the program they develop fine motor skills, become involved in creative table activities, improve their social skills, overcome shyness, and gain confidence in their Indigenous identity through language and culture taught by grandmothers and other role models.[31]

9.48 Geraldton Secondary College is a large government secondary school with two campuses and a total population of around 1,700 students. There are about 220 Indigenous students (around 13 per cent of the total population). The Indigenous students tend to be concentrated in the younger years. There were only twelve Indigenous students in year 12, eleven of whom were female. The numbers were said to start falling at around year 9. Truancy could be a problem, although this was mainly on pension days. The Geraldton Youth Support program picks up some truants and provides them with the opportunity to make up work off-site. Incentives such as fishing trips are provided for students who stick to the program. Parental involvement was said to be rare, partly due to the parents' negative experiences of their own schooling. The College was running a language program with a local grandmother. There was also a vocational program available at one of the campuses, which had been set up for young people (not necessarily Indigenous) who were not succeeding in the mainstream. A Commonwealth funded remedial reading program provided intensive assistance to small groups of students, around one third of whom were

31 Site visit, Meekaway Pre-School, Geraldton, WA , 13 September, 1999

Indigenous. These students were said to do well on the program as long as they attended regularly. The school also employed a number of Indigenous education workers (AIEWs).

9.49 The Central West College of TAFE also has its main campus in Geraldton. The College covers a large region, including regional centres such as Geraldton and Carnarvon as well as some remote locations. The College is currently in a joint venture with Edith Cowan University, which has a regional centre program that moves from one centre to another. The program sets up in an area for four or five years. This allows enough time for a group of people to do a bridging course and a degree without having to leave their local area. An enabling course is being run in 1999 for people interested in going on to degrees. Next year the university will start a Bachelor of Education course. The overall aim is to increase the numbers of primary school teachers in the region. There are 21 people doing the enabling course this year. The College has also formed a partnership with Normandy Mining Company to run a program for Indigenous trainees. Eight out of the twelve participants who completed the program gained employment with the mining company. However, private sector outcomes were said to depend on the willingness of employers to employ Indigenous people and the level of cultural awareness of the organisation. Poor employment outcomes were a potential limiting factor in the ability of the College to gain funding for Indigenous vocational programs.

Kalgoorlie

9.50 East Kalgoorlie Primary School has an enrolment of 122 students, of which approximately 78 attended on the day of the Committee's visit. Around 99 per cent of students are Indigenous. They are drawn from the Kalgoolie-Boulder townships and around fifteen fringe camps. Many students are transient, coming in from the Ngannyatjarra Lands for periods of time. Staff said that it was not uncommon for two or three new children to arrive at school each day. Little or no information about the children comes with them.

9.51 The mainly Indigenous pupils come from a range of socio-economic circumstances and have had widely varying school experiences. This presents challenges that require imaginative solutions. Ensuring students actually get to school through the provision of a bus service is seen as essential. Students' 'learning readiness' is given priority through services offered by the Henderson Centre, an on site, privately funded, purpose built facility catering for all aspects of student health and well-being. The school relies heavily on the Centre to look at all issues that impact on the students' education, including health, behaviour and problems at home. Staff of the Henderson Centre check the hearing and general health of students when they start at the school and these are systematically followed up. Other community agencies come to the Centre and use the facility to access the students. Food, showers, and clean clothes are available, if required.

9.52 The school itself is well staffed, being based on enrolments rather than attendance. Student transience presents problems for delivering a planned educational

program and achieving results. Regular attendance is the key to achievement, with data showing that children who consistently attend are at or above average compared with other students. Teachers need to be flexible in the way they plan and deliver programs, balancing the needs of students who attend regularly with those who are transient Teachers also rely heavily on the AIEWs and teacher aides to assist with the varying literacy and numeracy levels of transient students.

9.53 A strong Indigenous presence was evident in both the classrooms and the Henderson Centre. The Committee believes that the pro-active approach to getting students to school through the provision of a bus service is an important component of success. At some public schools there was opposition to the provision of transport on the grounds that this undermined parental responsibility or entrenched already negligent behaviour.[32] Staff at the Henderson Centre believed that when the parents were caught up in drink or just not caring for their kids, the Centre had to take responsibility so that the children did not miss out.[33]

9.54 The 'best practice' demonstrated at East Kalgoorlie was the practical concern for the physical well-being of children and the obvious attention to early intellectual development which was paying off with improved levels of literacy. The Committee was told, however, that the work the school put in to reading skills could be at risk due to a lack of reinforcement by parents at home. Even with a good foundation and fluency in reading to grade 4 level, literacy skills could taper off through lack of extension.

Cairns

9.55 At Caravonica Primary School outside Cairns, a school with an Indigenous enrolment of 35 students out of a total of 500, the Committee discussed with the Principal and staff of the school the difficulties for Indigenous students in coping with the way the curriculum is delivered in a mainstream school. The Committee was told that process rather than content had become a focus for alternative strategies for Indigenous students. Some of the strategies employed to improve Indigenous student performance centred around changing students' perceptions of themselves from remedial students to active learners. At the parents' suggestion, Caravonica staff had initiated twelve culturally appropriate learning strategies or processes, which supplement their teaching expertise. A self-paced, cross-cultural, maths and literacy computer program from the United States called 'Successmaker' was introduced three years ago. This program has the capacity to highlight and redress problem areas through exposure to familiar material, presented repetitively in incremental small steps. The Committee questioned the cultural relevance of the program, but was assured that the academic benefits were such that its use was justified. Interestingly, the Principal of Hope Vale Community School had objections to 'Successmaker' on cultural grounds. Staff at Caravonica, however, believed cultural relevance came into

32 Site visit, Rangeway School, Geraldton, WA, 13 September 1999

33 Site vist, Hendersen Centre, Kalgoorlie, WA, 14 September 1999

the curriculum in other ways. This program was supplemented by teachers developing problem solving skills, with AIEWs and teacher aides generally supporting Indigenous students and non-Indigenous staff. In-school tutorials, the withdrawal of year 4/5 students for intensive work, the establishment of a learning unit, and monitoring by the ASSPA Committee, were other strategies employed by the school. Caravonica impressed the Committee in its commitment to raising the achievement levels of its Indigenous pupils. They appear to have a special place in the school, being a core group rather than a marginalised group. It appeared to be a successful case of affirmative action at work in both the academic and cultural life of the school.

9.56 At Caravonica Primary School the Committee heard complaints about delays and other administrative problems associated with Commonwealth funded programs for Indigenous students. Short term funding programs place schools in a dilemma because the formalities for application are onerous to the point of being out of proportion to the amounts of money allocated. The Principal suggested that Commonwealth funds be managed by the state education department to ensure accountability. The inability of the Commonwealth to guarantee funding for more than one year was also a source of frustration because short-term funding jeopardised good initiatives and made difficult the retention of valued Indigenous staff. By comparison, the state government had devolved management responsibility, including the discretionary use of finances, to the school and this was claimed to be operationally superior. The Committee was pleased to hear that local DETYA staff in Cairns used all of their discretionary powers and more to address problems that appear to result from policy implementation defects in Canberra.

Recommendation 32

9.57 The Committee recommends that funds under special purpose grants be provided to schools over a triennium.

9.58 The Committee heard varying evidence on the worth of homework centres funded under ASSPA. Some schools acknowledged that they had been using homework centre funding to provide individual or intensive learning programs.

Recommendation 33

9.59 The Committee recommends that DETYA guidelines allow for flexible use of ASSPA funding to allow school communities to apply grants that fit local educational programs most appropriately.

Brewarrina

9.60 Brewarrina in north western New South Wales has most of the characteristics of a township where half the population is Indigenous and employment opportunities are limited. At Brewarrina Central School 250 students are enrolled in programs from K-Y12. About 97 per cent of these students are Indigenous. The school is able to access several different sources of funding as a result of being designated 'disadvantaged' and through Aboriginal programs. This enables the school to focus on

innovative programs to address particular problem areas such as running a full senior secondary program for a small number of students. The school maintains links with other educational bodies such as the Distance Education Centre at Dubbo and the local TAFE.

9.61 Five of the 23 staff at Brewarrina Central School were Indigenous. In 1998 there was a staff turnover of 19, which was exceptionally high. Most new teachers were inexperienced and without experience of small-town life. Many had never met an Aboriginal person before. A local induction program was devised and funded by the NSW Department of Education. It allowed staff to travel to other areas to be mentored by more experienced staff, or for mentors to come to the town. Local Aboriginal people supplemented the program with Aboriginal history in Brewarrina, cultural education, and appropriate teaching methods for implementing the NATSIEP. This year the expected staff turnover is 7 or 8. There is an emphasis on Indigenous culture in the school and on awareness of the students' individual circumstances. While a few Aboriginal teachers had been employed in the past, there were no Aboriginal teachers in 1999. Most had gone on to better paying jobs in the public service, while one alluded to difficulties working with a predominantly white staff.

9.62 The Committee noted three aspects of particular interest arising from its visit to Brewarrina. The first was the fact that non-Indigenous pupils, with few exceptions, were enrolled at the local Catholic school. The second is the scheme in operation in New South Wales to track mobile pupils to ensure that they receive as much value from their schooling as possible. This matter is dealt with in Chapter 4. The aspirations of the Principal of Brewarrina Central School to incorporate TAFE accredited courses in the school curriculum are also noted in Chapter 4.

Bourke

9.63 Bourke High School has 160 students, just over 50 per cent of whom are Indigenous. A significant proportion leave school at fifteen or at the end of year 10. Some sections of the student population were said to be highly mobile. There were 78 movements in and out of school in the first two terms of 1999, although many of these movements involved the same students. The secondary curriculum and the need to teach to two major exams were described as significant limiting factors in teaching Indigenous students. Staff were restructuring the curriculum in order to make it more relevant to students.

9.64 The school offers a mixture of traditional academic subjects and vocational courses. The vocational options include part-time work placements. The school has a work education program in years 9 and 10 and a series of TAFE courses from year 10 upwards. Dual accredited vocational education courses in hospitality, rural industries, and building and construction are offered from year 9 upwards. The school is also represented on the Bourke Education Council, which involves educational institutions, community organisations and employer representatives. The Council aims to coordinate approaches to improving education and employment opportunities in Bourke.

Alice Springs

9.65 Yipirinya School in Alice Springs, is an independent, Indigenous controlled primary school used as a case study in *Learning Lessons*. Catering to an all Indigenous student body from several language groups in Central Australia, its strategies, including a partnership with the University of Canberra to pilot a 'scaffolding literacy' project, offer insights into the potential success of taking a culturally appropriate, rigorous approach and adopting high expectations of Indigenous students.[34]

9.66 Yirara College is a Lutheran co-educational, secondary boarding school in Alice Springs, which caters for Indigenous students from remote Northern Territory communities. Its capacity is 250 students but the average enrolment is 220. As a boarding school regular attendance is assured. There is an emphasis on teaching basic living skills in the boarding house, including tasks associated with general health and well being. This is supplemented by the provision of a balanced diet and access to a full-time health clinic. Visiting specialists, including dentists, come to the school regularly. The student body is mainly comprised of traditionally oriented Indigenous students whose families want them to be able to live in 'two worlds'. Yirara provides an accelerated pre-secondary and secondary learning program with a strong emphasis on literacy.

9.67 Yirara College is noted in *Learning Lessons* for demonstrating the relationship between learning outcomes and attendance.

> Among the forty-four schools that the review visited, Yirara College was unique in that they analysed routinely collected data on student attendance and achievement. The high correlation that they found between attendance and improvement in scores in aptitude tests administered at the beginning and end of each term provides valuable evidence of what we know to be true – regular attendance is an essential starting point for improvement in educational outcomes.[35]

9.68 The Yirara submission to the inquiry called for the Government to be more insistent about school attendance, recommending legal action for non attendance, or welfare payments to be withheld. The Committee believes, however, that in line with their preference for a community development approach, Yirara's recommendation that Indigenous people need to be informed about the issues is a better one.

> The expectation that children attend school, along with the other major issues needs to be put before Indigenous people so that they can think through the issues in an informed way. That is to say, raise the issues to a level such that people can consciously grapple with the issues. At the moment people out bush do not spend much time thinking about the issues

34 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, pp. 132-133

35 *ibid.*, p 155

because school is seen as non-compulsory, a place for students to be entertained.[36]

9.69 The Irrkerlantye Learning Centre (formerly the Detour Program) in Alice Springs is an example of an alternative approach to education, undertaken in response to unique local circumstances. Within the Indigenous community of Alice Springs there is significant diversity. Tangentyere Council's eighteen town camps which caters for local Arrernte and other Central Australian language groups living (or visiting) Alice Springs is part of that diversity. Tangentyere Council, the Indigenous equivalent of the Alice Springs Town Council, caters for the infrastructure and other needs of town campers, and is pro-active in seeking improvements to all facets of town campers' lives. Tangentyere Council often forms strategic alliances with other agencies and organisations to ensure such improvements occur and are maximised, and run a Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) ("work for the dole") funded by ATSIC.

9.70 The Irrkerlantye Learning Centre is a joint initiative of Tangentyere Council, Centralian College, and the Northern Territory Department of Education. The Centre's physical location is considered an important factor in respect of cultural appropriateness. The Centre is located at Hidden Valley, one of the three town camps the Centre serves. It adopts an inter-generational approach to the provision of an integrated, culturally appropriate educational program, which targets people from 11-55 years of age and over. An agreed model has been developed in consultation with the town campers, whose needs and aspirations have driven the process. The model takes a community development approach, so the educational program revolves around projects and activities, which directly benefit the town camps involved, and leads to enterprise development and the creation of real work options for participants. At the heart of the model is Arrernte language and culture. The provision of education and training, and the health and well being of families is integrated in the model.

Differing urban and metropolitan needs

9.71 In 1996, around 30 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians lived in major urban centres (100,000 people or more) compared to 63 per cent of the general population.[37] For the majority of Indigenous students in metropolitan centres, their choice of education is limited to mainstream provision, with some exceptions. English as a first language is the norm, which should indicate greater literacy proficiency than their remote and rural counterparts. It was reported to the Committee, however, that literacy problems were as pronounced in the city as in the country. Available data suggest that urban dwelling Indigenous people have higher levels of literacy than their non-urban dwelling counterparts but that they remain well

36 Submission No. 9, Yirara College, vol. 1, p. 80

37 www.gov.au, Australia Now – A Statistical Profile, Special Article, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: A statistical profile from the 1996 Census*, p. 4

below the levels of non-Indigenous people. The NATSIEP had ensured improvements in the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum, and the involvement of parents through ASSPA Committees, but more needed to be done. One Indigenous educator's perception was that in some cases the teaching of history was still not inclusive of Indigenous people and that mainstream teachers still needed cross cultural awareness training and support from greater numbers of Aboriginal Education Assistants.

9.72 Improved resources were also needed to address the lack of confidence and general education of Indigenous parents.[38] It was noted that many Indigenous parents had negative experiences at school themselves and found it difficult to promote school or to place the importance on schooling that would result in improved attendance and achievement. Family support for Indigenous students was identified as crucial in promoting attendance, and addressing the lack of confidence and general education of parents was seen an important factor.

9.73 The Manager of Aboriginal Programs in the NSW Department of Education and Training informed the Committee that Aboriginal History is a compulsory module in Stages 4 and 5 of the NSW Board of Studies History Syllabus. Aboriginal Education Consultants are located in district offices throughout the state to run workshops to assist teachers implement Aboriginal Perspectives across the Curriculum from K-Year 12. There has also been a Cross Cultural Awareness program delivered over the last three years to between 60 and 90 per cent of teachers, at an average cost of approximately $1 million per annum. The Department intends to implement a similar program for new teachers once the current program is completed. It was noted, too, that 'confidence' courses *per se* were usually the province of the Adult Community Education sector, who have specific strategies to encourage Indigenous adults to participate. In contrast, TAFE is vocationally oriented and runs courses in response to communities expressing a need. However, a substantial percentage of Aboriginal TAFE students enrol in Aboriginal Art and Cultural Practices, in which a unit on Aboriginal Identity targets improved confidence and self-esteem.[39]

9.74 Despite greater access to services in metropolitan areas, submissions to the inquiry and subsequent requests for detail indicate that 'remoteness' and 'isolation' could be just as prevalent in 'The Block' in Redfern, or Mount Druitt and Penrith in Western Sydney as in Kalgoorlie, Bourke, or Papunya. Metropolitan schools contacted by the Committee spoke of entrenched socio-economic disadvantage in the Indigenous community as the major contributing factor to high levels of absenteeism, transiency, lack of punctuality, and literacy problems. The President of the Mt Druitt AECG, Ms Christine Forshew, spoke of children as young as 12 years old being lost to the system, and other school age children presenting with huge gaps in their

38 Comments from Bruce Kendall, Eora Centre, Redfern, 22 November 1999

39 Comments from Pam Gill, Manager, Aboriginal Programs, NSW Department of Education and Training, 23 November 1999

education. Options to access an appropriate education for such children were extremely limited. Of more concern to the Committee was Ms Forshew's assertion that government agencies were bypassing established AECGs and other Indigenous bodies in matters where consultation with Indigenous people was critical. This was usually in relation to funding for programs for Indigenous youth. In some cases AECGs were ineffective in coordinating partnerships, good relations and leadership.[40]

9.75 'Discrimination, racism, colonial structures and attitudes and neo-tribal imperialism' were said to impact adversely on Aboriginal staff working as facilitators between the wider community and the Indigenous community, as well as undermining the community as a resource. Factionalism between family and community groups and organisations was also said to be detrimental to initiatives aimed at assisting youth, and Indigenous advancement generally, as well as impacting on efficient service delivery.[41] The Committee was advised that sometimes ASSPA committees and AECGs were not always aligned in their views.[42]

9.76 Indigenous students are often scattered across a number of metropolitan schools. The result of such a dispersed student body often means that small numbers of Indigenous students in a range of metropolitan schools do not benefit from some of the initiatives that would flow on to larger numbers of students. In contrast to this view, the Principal at Redfern Public School mentioned that the school's Indigenous student body was drawn from surrounding suburbs, mainly because it was seen as a Koori school. Resources and initiatives included a Reading Recovery program, two Aboriginal Education Assistants, an Aboriginal Resource Teacher, four classroom teachers, and part time specialists in ESL and Specific Teacher Learning Difficulties.[43]

9.77 The success of Meekawaya Aboriginal Pre-School in Geraldton was replicated in metropolitan Sydney. Two inner-city Indigenous pre-Schools, Murawina, located in 'The Block', and Wannanbiri, established at the Cleveland Street High School campus, were praised for providing a 'good start' to Indigenous children's education. An eight week term 4 'Kids to Kindy' program had been developed as a transition program for pre-schoolers from Murawina going on to Redfern Public School, and this was viewed positively for consolidating the good start at pre-school.[44]

9.78 Co-operation between inner city schools optimises the sharing of best practice and resources. Cleveland Street High School (55 per cent Indigenous students) was working with Redfern Public School (57 per cent), Waterloo Public School (25 per cent and growing) and Alexandria Public School (20 per cent) on developing

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40 Comments from Christine Forshew, President, Mt Druitt AECG, 22 November 1999

41 Briefing Paper, from Christine Forshew, President, Mt Druitt AECG, 23 November 1999

42 Comments from Pam Gill, Manager, Aboriginal Programs, Department of Education and Training 23 November, 1999

43 Comments from Cheryl Robens, Principal, Redfern Public School, 22 November 1999

44 Comments from Cheryl Robens, Principal, Redfern Public School, 22 November 1999

measures for keeping Grade 5 to 8 students in school and optimising their educational outcomes. Although this was an initiative covering all students, the high numbers of Indigenous students in these schools ensures a focus on issues specific to them.[45] Redfern Public School and Darlington Primary School are to share a school bus funded by a local Indigenous group. One inner-city Principal stated that instead of viewing attendance and punctuality as a problem created by Indigenous people, it should be viewed as a public transport problem. She stated that adequate public transport was not available to inner-city families who lived in close proximity to their schools, unlike their suburban counterparts who traversed many suburbs to attend school. She had noted an increase in attendance and improved punctuality when a school bus provided transport for inner-city families. 'If you have a family of six kids and it's a rainy day, its easier to keep the children at home than worry about how to get them there on time'. [46]

9.79 Cleveland Street High School is addressing problems facing Indigenous students with a range of strategies underpinned by strong links and relationships with community organisations. The school recognises that Indigenous students feel more comfortable in a predominantly non-Indigenous setting if they are part of a larger group. The school has adopted an integrated, inter-agency approach, and runs Secondary Schools/TAFE programs in partnership with the Eora Centre at Redfern, which is part of the TAFE system but well known for its education and training provision to Indigenous people. The school also undertakes special initiatives such as the Koori Youth Program, and have been funded to run an Aboriginal Literacy Stage 6 Program. Attendance is maximised by the provision of a school bus run every morning and the employment of Indigenous Home-School Liaison Officers, who are viewed as critical in improving attendance and tracking transient students.

9.80 Tracking students is a major issue for Cleveland Street High School. There is a 60 per cent turnover in the Indigenous student population, and this creates many difficulties for students and staff alike. Every student coming into the school in Grade 10 or below is tested for literacy and, depending on the results of this test, is slotted into an intensive reading program of three 75 minute sessions each week. Underpinning this is a comprehensive student welfare safety net involving many different agencies, without which classroom learning would be severely diminished. The Principal said that the value of this student welfare safety net has only been realised over the past two or three years. She praised her teaching staff for their flexibility and professionalism. Teachers are never sure who is going to turn up in their classes on any given day. Continuity of good teaching staff was viewed as one of the bonuses of working in a metropolitan school.[47]

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45 Comments from Peter Spiers, Acting Principal, Cleveland Street High School, 22 November 1999

46 Comments from Principal, Darlington Public School, 22 November 1999

47 Comments from Sue Holden, Principal, Cleveland Street High School, 23 November, 1999

9.81 The NSW Department of Education and Training funds Year 11 and 12 students, both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, from all over the metropolitan area to attend the Aboriginal Studies Access Program at Cleveland Street High School. This subject is part of the Higher School Certificate syllabus.

9.82 The submission from the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) outlined details about the Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) project, an initiative of the Victorian Department of Education and the VAEAI, begun in 1995. The project operates in three Victorian State schools, one located in metropolitan Glenroy. KODE schools take a whole of family or inter-generational approach. Schools interested in becoming a KODE school must have the capacity to run a program from early childhood to Year 12, have a stipulated information technology infrastructure, be prepared to facilitate self-determination within the Koorie community, and involve the wider community in intensive consultation. There is a standard particular participative process involved in the planning and implementation of a KODE school, including calling for expressions of interest, and visiting the community to consult with Indigenous people and the wider community. A local task force is then established.

9.83 The curriculum seeks to meet the needs of Koorie students and the community by providing a Koorie inclusive curriculum. Attention to cultural maintenance, Aboriginal pedagogy, appropriate support for students, sensitising teachers to issues affecting Indigenous students, and maximum Koorie participation in all aspects of schooling, especially through Koorie representation on Campus Councils, are other important aspects affecting the curriculum.[48]

9.84 An initial review of the existing KODE schools is currently before the Victorian Minister for Education, but early indications of success are improved participation and retention rates, and reduced numbers of youth on the streets or in conflict with the police. One difficulty in metropolitan Glenroy is that Indigenous students travel from surrounding suburbs to school but do not interact outside school hours, diminishing the positive effects of the family approach. However, the VAEAI and interested people are currently discussing this with a view to improving social interaction on weekends.[49]

9.85 Tauondi College is an independent post-secondary education provider based in Port Adelaide. The College caters specifically for Indigenous students and provides both accredited VET sector courses and non-accredited adult education courses. One of the principal roles for the College has been to take students who do not fit into mainstream institutions. The College currently has about 240 students. All enrolled students are studying accredited courses, although they can elect to undertake some non-accredited courses as part of their studies. Community members are also invited

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48 Briefing Paper from Lionel Bamblett, VAEAI, 19 November 1999

49 Submission No. 20, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, vol. 2, p. 78, and comments from Lionel Bamblett, VAEAI, 19 November 1999

to take part in the non-accredited courses. About twenty community members were taking part in short non-accredited courses offered by the College in 1999. There was said to be increasing interest from community members in the short courses.

9.86 One of the main difficulties for the College is dealing with the complex emotional and social needs of students who come from severely disadvantaged backgrounds. The College puts a strong emphasis on addressing the cultural, health and social welfare needs of students. Courses run by the College include Aboriginal cultural instruction, tour guiding, art and design, community services/community development, and community services/primary health care. The primary health care course was not run in 1999 due to insufficient numbers.

Conclusion

9.87 This chapter has documented some of the diverse educational arrangements encountered by the Committee in the course of the inquiry. This diversity reflects the high level of cultural, social and geographic diversity among Indigenous communities. Most of the reports and inquiries undertaken over the last ten years have sought to take this diversity into account but there have been criticisms of the way in which it has been done. Some commentators argue that the NATSIEP contains rather than encourages diversity by favouring particular models of educational disadvantage. Cultural models, for example, fail to reflect the wishes of those communities seeking access to mainstream educational opportunities. Other submissions to the inquiry, however, criticised the policy for failing to allow real self determination and community control of educational institutions. This was highlighted in particular in relation to adult education.

9.88 The Committee was encouraged by the diversity of educational arrangements encountered in the course of the inquiry but recognises that this diversity was in many cases one of content and method rather than structure. The NATSIEP appears to have facilitated the introduction of more diverse curricula and teaching practices in schools and other educational institutions. In most instances, Indigenous communities have been involved in these changes. Some of the results have been documented in this chapter. Many people pointed to the real and potential benefits of these changes for Indigenous students. What was less apparent to the Committee was whether the NATSIEP had done enough to facilitate diversity in structural arrangements. The Committee received evidence from only a few community controlled institutions, but was made aware of some of the barriers to community control of education. These barriers have been documented in various inquiries and reports. The community controlled institutions encountered in the course of the inquiry appeared to be providing a valuable service to Indigenous communities, particularly in catering for students who had experienced little success in mainstream educational institutions. Their importance needs to be recognised and supported by governments. The Committee is equally aware, however, that not all Indigenous people see community control as a priority. Governments need to keep in mind that Indigenous communities have diverse expectations of education and that access to good mainstream services will be a significant priority for many. Empowering Indigenous people 'to exercise the

maximum degree of choice in education', as recommended in the National Review, means providing Indigenous people with the alternatives to choose from.[50]

Recommendation 34

9.89 The Committee recommends that the Minister initiate through MCEETYA a review of current processes for determining the allocation of capital works grants to schools with a substantial Indigenous enrolment.

50 *ibid.*, p. 27

CONCLUSION

> ... as long as I have been in this business, the more I know the less I understand – so good luck.[1]

10.1 This inquiry has examined some of the more significant reports undertaken in Indigenous education over the past ten years. In general, it has found a mixed record on implementation of the recommendations made in these reports. In some instances, recommendations have been backed up by government programs and funding initiatives but there has been little enthusiasm with regard to some of the more problematic areas such as self determination and Indigenous control of educational institutions.

10.2 Nevertheless, the Committee found a high level of support for the goals and principles of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. The commitment of dedicated and consistent levels of supplementary funding for Indigenous education was seen as one of the most significant practical outcomes. The involvement of all Australian governments in a coordinated national approach to achieving common goals in Indigenous education was also seen as positive, although there were some concerns over the extent to which the national policy recognised or catered for diversity among Indigenous communities.

10.3 In conducting its inquiry the Committee was made aware of a number of fundamental debates in Indigenous education. These included debates over the role of culturally inclusive curricula, teacher preparation, and language and literacy issues. The Committee sees the climate of debate surrounding these issues as a healthy development and a sign of progress. The Committee has documented some of the arguments on these issues in this report. The Committee recognises that diversity of opinion in many instances may reflect the diversity of experience within Indigenous communities. The Committee observes, however, that the majority of Indigenous people share two basic expectations of education: that it will provide access to the same mainstream opportunities as those available to non-Indigenous Australians; and that it will affirm and value Indigenous culture, languages and spiritual beliefs.

10.4 That there has been significant progress over the last ten years is undeniable. Some of the changes in educational participation and achievement are documented in this report. Indigenous people still lag behind non-Indigenous people in many areas but there have been improvements. The Committee noticed many encouraging developments in its hearings and visits. Many of the areas visited for the inquiry were in the process of implementing more culturally inclusive curriculum and teaching practices. The teaching of Indigenous studies subjects and languages has also progressed significantly. Indigenous people have become involved in educational decision making through participation in ASSPA committees and through

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1 Professor Paul Hughes, *Hansard*, Canberra, 30 August 1999, p. 339

involvement in determining the content of school programs. Levels of Indigenous employment in education have also increased, even if predominantly at the lower employment levels. The Committee noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) were employed in almost all of the schools visited for the inquiry.

10.5 However, the Committee notes some continuing concerns and failures. Perhaps of most concern to the Committee were the continuing low levels of teacher preparation for teaching Indigenous students. The Committee believes more could be done to improve the preparation of teachers. Government education departments, as the main employers of teachers, need to do more to ensure that universities do a better job of preparing teachers. The Committee is also concerned at the low levels of employment of Indigenous people as teachers. The Committee acknowledges that competing areas of employment make it difficult for governments to take action but considers that more could be done to retain Indigenous people within the teaching profession. The Committee also considers that a consistent national approach to improving the working conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) is long overdue. For many Indigenous students, AIEWs provide the most consistently visible Indigenous presence in education. Their importance deserves greater recognition.

10.6 The high level of absenteeism among Indigenous school students was a significant issue raised with the Committee in many locations. Community members and educators were concerned at the impact of absenteeism on student achievement. The Committee understands that a range of factors can be involved in absenteeism, including disrupted family circumstances, high levels of transience, the nature of the school environment, and community attitudes towards education. The Committee notes advice from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs that work is currently being undertaken in the development of a national Indigenous school attendance strategy. The Committee also notes advice from some Indigenous community members themselves that the remedy for absenteeism lies at least partly with Indigenous communities.

10.7 Adult education is another important area that generally receives little prominence in policy making. The Committee believes that it is a particularly important area for Indigenous people. The most significant increases in Indigenous educational participation in recent years have been among the mature age Indigenous population. Many of these students come from low levels of previous educational achievement. Adult education has an important role to play in community development and deserves greater prominence in Indigenous educational policy making. The Committee is encouraged by the inclusion of community development training for Indigenous adults as one of the priorities of the MCEETYA national strategy, but has some concerns over the extent to which this has been reflected in actual policies to date.

10.8 The Committee also notes the obvious fact that Indigenous students are subject to many of the same changes in curriculum and educational delivery that affect

all students. Concerns were raised with the Committee that some of these changes could impact adversely on Indigenous education and might work against some of the broader aims of Indigenous educational policy. Specific concerns were raised with regard to vocational education and training, and teacher supply. These broader changes need to be monitored carefully to ensure that Indigenous students are not further disadvantaged.

10.9 The Committee was made acutely aware of the complex inter-relationships involved in addressing many Indigenous educational needs. Factors such as health and economic well-being have a strong impact on levels of educational participation, and are in turn influenced by the educational levels of Indigenous peoples. One of the strongest messages to come out of the Committee's hearings was the need for holistic approaches that involve action across a range of areas. Educational improvements on their own have little chance of success without improvements in health care, social and community well-being, and general living conditions. While progress in these areas depends fundamentally on the involvement of Indigenous communities, the support of government agencies working cooperatively to provide an appropriate and sensitive 'whole of government' approach is imperative.

10.10 In concluding, the Committee believes strongly that Indigenous education needs to remain in the forefront of policy debate in this country. A number of submissions to the inquiry called for regular national reviews of Indigenous education similar to the 1994 national review. The Committee notes that the NATSIEP is about to enter its fourth triennium of operation. The Committee believes that a comprehensive review of the national policy should be undertaken in 2002, at the end of the fourth triennium of operation.

APPENDIX 1

THE 21 GOALS OF THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION POLICY (AEP)

Involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision-making

Goal 1

To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of preschool, primary and secondary education services for their children.

Goal 2

To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching of Aboriginal culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal languages.

Goal 3

To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

Goal 4

To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

Goal 5

To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal people to participate in educational decision-making.

Goal 6

To develop arrangements for the provision of independent advice for Aboriginal communities regarding educational decisions at regional, State, Territory and National levels.

Equality of access to educational services

Goal 7

To ensure that Aboriginal children of pre-primary school age have access to preschool services on a basis comparable to that available to other Australian children of the same age.

Goal 8

To ensure that all Aboriginal children have local access to primary and secondary schooling.

Goal 9

To ensure equitable access for Aboriginal people to post-compulsory secondary schooling, to technical and further education, and higher education.

Equity of educational participation

Goal 10

To achieve the participation of Aboriginal children in preschool education for a period similar to that for all Australian children.

Goal 11

To achieve the participation of all Aboriginal children in compulsory schooling.

Goal 12

To achieve the participation of Aboriginal people in post-compulsory secondary education, in technical and further education, and in higher education, at rates commensurate with those of all Australians in those sectors.

Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes

Goal 13

To provide adequate preparation of Aboriginal children through preschool education for the schooling years ahead.

Goal 14

To enable Aboriginal attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.

Goal 15

To enable Aboriginal students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.

Goal 16

To enable Aboriginal students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.

Goal 17

To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal languages.

Goal 18

To provide community education services which enable Aboriginal people to develop skills to manage the development of their communities.

Goal 19

To enable attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal adults with limited or no educational experience.

Goal 20

To enable Aboriginal students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.

Goal 21

To provide all Australians students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal traditional and contemporary cultures.

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

01	Indigenous Open Learning Australia Steering Committee, VIC
02	Jilkminggan School Council, NT
03	Jilkminggan Community Government Council, NT
04	Mr Peter Toyne, MLA, Alice Springs, NT
05	Catholic Education Office, South Australian Catholic Aboriginal Education Team, SA
06	Hunter Region Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, NSW
07	Mr Peter Reynolds, Edith Cowan University, WA
08	Ms Karen Mallard, Edith Cowan University, WA
09	Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc., NT
10	University of Newcastle, Aboriginal academic staff, NSW
11	Lesley Wemyss Training Consultancy, QLD
12	Ms Christine Nicholls, Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law & Theology, School of Cultural Studies, Flinders University, SA
13	Central Australian and Barkly Aboriginal Health Worker Association, NT
14	Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association Inc., TAS
15	Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers, NT
16	Aboriginal Education and Training Council of Western Australia, WA
17	Ms Deborah Durnan, Alice Springs, NT
18	Professor Susan Bambrick, La Trobe University, VIC
19	Institute for Aboriginal Development Inc., NT
20	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc., VIC
21	Kakadu Employment, Education and Training Group, NT
22	Queensland Teachers' Union, QLD

23	Southbank Institute of TAFE, Indigenous peoples unit, QLD
24	Australian Education Union, VIC
25	National Union of Students, VIC
26	Papunya School and Community, NT
27	National Tertiary Education Industry Union, VIC
28	Northern Territory Department of Education, NT
29	Mr Scott Johnston, Brisbane, QLD
30	South Australian Government, SA
31	South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee, SA
32	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Schools Division, ACT
33	Northern Territory Department of Education, Aboriginal Education Branch, NT
34	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, NT
35	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, ACT
36	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, NT
37	Australian Library and Information Association, ACT
38	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network, QLD
39	Australian Society of Archivists Inc., ACT
40	Mr Bruce Wilson, Brewarrina, NSW
41	Centre for Indigenous Health, Education and Research, QLD
42	Dr Bob Boughton, Menzies School of Health Research, Central Australian Unit, NT
43	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, NSW

APPENDIX 3

WITNESSES WHO APPEARED BEFORE THE COMMITTEE AT THE PUBLIC HEARINGS AND SITE VISITS

The following witnesses gave evidence at the public hearings:

BOURKE, NSW - 26 JULY 1999

Chapman, Mr Michael David, Principal, Bourke High School

Dixon, Mr Tony, Aboriginal Liaison Officer, St Ignatius Primary School

Doule, Mr Ralph, Bourke Language Centre

Elmore, Father James Godfrey, School Chaplain, St Ignatius Primary School

Fordyce, Brother Mark, Principal, St Ignatius Primary School

Loxley, Mr Paul Andrew, Principal, Bourke Public School

O'Malley, Mr Desmond John, Relieving Superintendent, Department of Education and Training

Payne, Mr Douglas, Aboriginal Teachers Aide, Bourke High School

Salt, Ms Alison Margaret, Teacher, Bourke Public School

Sullivan, Mr Phillip John, Community Member

BREWARRINA, NSW - 26 JULY 1999

Barker, Mrs Jeanette, Manager, Northern Star Aboriginal Corporation, Community Development Employment Program

Barker, Miss Frayne, Director, Gainmara Birrilee Preschool

Dufty, Miss Ruythe Maris, Principal, Brewarrina Central School

Eppelstun, Mrs Catherine Mary, Principal, St Patrick's School

Fazldeen, Miss Natalie Ann, Coordinator of the Brewarrina Mobile Resource Van, Brewarrina Shire Council

Felsch, Mr Peter James, General Manager, Brewarrina Shire Council

Pippos, Mrs Jay, Director, Child Care, Brewarrina Shire Council

Reneker, Senior Sergeant Anthony Mark, Sector Supervisor, New South Wales Police Force

Shearer, Mrs Noeleen, Aboriginal Education Worker, St Patrick's School

Wilson, Mr Bruce, Participant, Community Development Employment Program

Wiltshire, Mr Anthony Mark, Youth and Community Development Officer, Brewarrina Shire Council

ADELAIDE, SA - 27 JULY 1999

Campbell, Mr Michael, Coordinator, Indigenous Education, Catholic Education Office, South Australia

D'Antoine, Ms Nicole Lee, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representative, National Union of Students

Gollan, Miss Dina, Project Officer, Catholic Education Office, South Australia

Loh, Miss Evelyn Chih-Ping, National Education Officer, National Union of Students

Nicholls, Dr Christine Judith (Private capacity)

Rigney, Mr Lester Irabinna, Lecturer, Yunggorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research, Flinders University

Thomas, Mr Roger James, Director, Wilto Yerlo, University of Adelaide

Tunstill, Mr Guy Duncan, Curriculum Officer Aboriginal Languages, Languages and Multiculturalism Teams, South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment

Wilson, Mr Gregory James, Curriculum Officer Aboriginal Languages, Languages and Multiculturalism Teams, South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment

PORT ADELAIDE, SA - 27 JULY 1999

Bruza, Mrs Natalie Anne, Deputy Chair, South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee

Dowling, Mr John Arthur, Research Officer, South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee

Kartinyeri, Mr Cyril, Committee member, South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee

Lampard, Mr Frank Henry, Chair, South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee

Wilson, Mr Bill, Director, Tauondi College, and Committee member, South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee

TOWNSVILLE, QLD - 4 AUGUST 1999

Bone, Ms Roseanna Leah, Lecturer, School of Social Work and Community Welfare; and Coordinator, Bachelor of Community Welfare Distance Education Program, James Cook University

Elston, Associate Professor Jacinta, Head, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Studies, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University

Herbert, Professor Heather Jeannie, Head of School, School of Indigenous Australian Studies, James Cook University

Jones, Professor Rhondda Elizabeth, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, James Cook University

Mackay, Ms Gail, District Director, Townsville-Burdekin District, Education Queensland

Martin, Ms Karen Lillian, Lecturer and Course Coordinator, Bachelor of Indigenous Studies, School of Indigenous Australian Studies, James Cook University

Martinez, Dr Kay Frances, Senior Lecturer, Director of Professional Experience, School of Education, James Cook University

McDonald, Ms Helen, Lecturer, Education for Cultural Diversity, School of Education, James Cook University

McTaggart, Professor Robin, Executive Dean of Education and Indigenous Studies, James Cook University

Meehan, Mrs Janet Dorothy, Principal, Thuringowa State High School, Education Queensland

Metcalfe, Mrs Janet Anne, Principal, Rasmussen State School, Education Queensland

Moore, Ms Sharon Anne, Lecturer-Course Coordinator Hutac, School of Indigenous Australian Studies, James Cook University

Putt, Dr Ian John, Senior Lecturer in Education, School of Education, James Cook University

Savage, Mrs Dorothy May, District Community Education Counsellor, Townsville-Burdekin District, Education Queensland

Scott, Mr John, Deputy Head of School, School of Indigenous Australian Studies, James Cook University

Smith, Dr Kenneth Frederick, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, James Cook University

Wronski, Professor Ian, Executive Dean, Faculty of Health, Life and Molecular Sciences, James Cook University

York, Dr Frank, Academic Coordinator, RATEP, School of Education, James Cook University

ALICE SPRINGS, NT - 6 AUGUST 1999

Ah Chee, Ms Donna Marie, Director, Institute for Aboriginal Development, and Vice President, Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers

Blaiklock, Mrs Mary, Principal, Braitling Primary School

Boughton, Dr Bob, Senior Research Fellow, Indigenous Health and Education Program, Cooperative Research Centre for Indigenous and Tropical Health

Davies, Mr Kenneth Lindsay, Acting Director of Aboriginal Education, Northern Territory Department of Education

Davis, Ms Ann, Regional Senior Lecturer and Campus Coordinator, Central Australian Campus, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

Genuth, Mrs Fay Jane, Acting Principal, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission

Gilchrist, Brother Paul Thomas, Principal, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Alice Springs

Kerber, Mr Lester Paul, Business Manager, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc

Lea, Ms Teresa Sue, Project Manager, Aboriginal Education Review, Northern Territory Department of Education

Totham, Mr Russell Hamilton, General Manager Operations, Northern Territory Department of Education

Totham, Mrs Jillian Fay, Senior Education Officer, Secondary Indigenous Education, Northern Territory Department of Education

CANBERRA, ACT - 30 AUGUST 1999

Buckskin, Mr Peter, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Education Branch, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Curtis, Mr David, Commissioner, Central Zone, Northern Territory, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Gela, Mr Rocky Joe, Board Member for South Australia, Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board

Greer, Mr Anthony John, First Assistant Secretary, Schools Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Hawke, Mr Lewis Raymond, Assistant General Manager, Commercial Branch, Economic Division, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Hughes, Professor Paul, Director, Yunggorendi First Nations Centre, Flinders University

Karmel, Dr Tom, Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Operations Branch, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Mills, Mr Benny, Manager, Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Smallacombe, Ms Sonia Ann, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Task Force, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

White, Ms Lorraine Susan, Assistant Secretary, Pathways Programmes Branch, Training and Youth Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

SITE VISITS AND INSPECTIONS

The Committee visited a number of areas and held informal meetings with educators and community members associated with schools. A list of these follows.

Cairns, Qld - 2 August 1999

Caravonica Primary School - Russ Pastourel (Principal), Marco Trovalusci (Deputy Principal), Meena Rastoka, Laurel ven Delden, Petrina McGaughey, Mark Sedan, Marco Bailey and Ms Brimm.

Cairns West State School - Kath Johnson (Principal), Karen Silva (Deputy Principal), Kate Pilot, Sally French, Lex Ross, Heather Johns, Richard Seveka, Rosemary Iloste, Leitha Pedro, and John Adams.

Cooktown, Qld - 2 August 1999

Cooktown State High School - Laurie Shepherd (Principal), Elizabeth Berger (Deputy Principal), John Shay, Tracey Harding, Melissa Griffiths, Rosie Harrigan, Dawn Humphreyson, Priscilla Blanco, Flo Deemal, James Humphreyson, Rianna Hart, Vincent Harrigan, Lionel Wallace, Bradley Cannon, Steve Mitchell, Ross Grimley, Lee Ivers, John Daly and Robin Maxwell.

Hope Vale State School - Randall Smith (Principal) and members of the community.

Weipa, Qld - 3 August 1999

Jessica Point School, Napranum Community - Ian Unicomb (Principal), Jean Jans, Maryanne Coconut and Deidre Coughlan.

Comalco, (site of VET program) - Mal Cockburn, Nick Senapati, Sean Kruger.

Thursday Island, Qld - 3 August 1999

District Education Office - Ian Hodges and Keith Josey from RATEP who were speaking to the committee as individuals.

Torres Strait Islands Regional Education Council - Ms Thecla Sabatino (Secretary) and Mr Morris Kerr.

Thursday Island High School - Lois Laidlaw, Deputy Principal

Thursday Island Hospital, University of Queensland/QUT health workers program - Mr Phillip Mills, Dr Melissa Hopkins, Ms Grace Fisher, Dr Farfoy, Prof. Ken MacDonald.

Badu Island, Qld - 4 August 1999

Badu Island School - Kay Ahmat, (Principal), and Walter Nona

Yuendumu, NT - 5 August 1999

Yuendumu Primary School - Andrew Merchant (Principal), and other people from Yuendumu.

Papunya, NT - 5 August 1999

Papunya Primary School - Diane de Vere (Principal), Charlotte Phillipus, Nadine Williams, Punata Stockman, Violet Kantawarra, Keith Jurra, Morris Major, Patricia Phillipus, Carolyn Pickett, Jodie Bishop, Peter Dietz, Jeff Hulcombe, Christine Perks, Helen Wilkinson and Ngulintji Nungarraji, and others

Geraldton, WA - 13 September 1999

The Committee met the following representatives of local agencies and schools:

Geraldton Aboriginal Education Centre, including Simon Forrest, Marion Baumgarten and Lois Spehn - Jackson.

Aboriginal Islander Education Workers of the Mid West region at the Geraldton Aboriginal Education Centre.

Staff from the **Mid West District Education Office**, including John Garnaut, District Director, and Nicki Patterson, Coordinator of Aboriginal Education, ASSPA groups and the Aboriginal Education Council, the Aboriginal Reference Group, the Geraldton Aboriginal Cycling Offending Program, and the Commission of Elders.

Rangeway Primary School, and Principal, Peter Reigden, and staff.

Geraldton Secondary College and met the Principal, Kathy Ritchie, and staff.

Central West College of TAFE, which has a joint venture with Edith Cowan University, and met TAFE staff and Sandy Kerr, the coordinator of the local Edith Cowan University program.

Meekawaya Preschool, and Principal Jeanette May.

Kalgoorlie Boulder, WA – 14-15 September 1999

The committee met representatives of the **Goldfields District Education Office**, including Mr Neil Darby, District Superintendent, Ms Jan Pocock, Mr Paul Bottcher (Head of Department, Student Services, Eastern Goldfields Senior High School) Mr Shane Cumming (Coordinator of Aboriginal Education, GDEO) and Ms Michelle Forrest (AIEW).

Curtin University - Ms Sonia Ferns, Acting Head of Humanities, and members of the university's staff.

The Committee also travelled to **East Kalgoorlie Primary School** and the Henderson Centre and met the Principal, Mr Geoff Miller, and staff and also travelled to **Coolgardie Primary School** and met the Principal, Ms Stana Couzic, and staff.

APPENDIX 4

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
AEDP	Aboriginal Employment Develop Policy
AEP	Aboriginal Education Policy
AERT	Aboriginal Education Resource Teachers
AESIP	Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program [now IESIP]
AETC	Aboriginal Education and Training Council
AEU	Australian Education Union
AEW	Aboriginal Education Worker
AHW	Aboriginal Health Worker
AIEW	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Worker
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program
ATAS	Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme
ATNAC	Anangu Tjuta Nintirrikupayi Aboriginal Corporation
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSIPTAC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Training Advisory Council
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU
CCIS	Community Care Information Systems
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CEC	Community Education Centre
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs [formerly DEETYA and DEET]
ENT	Ear, nose and throat
ESL	English as a second language

FIAEP	Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers
IAD	Institute of Aboriginal Development
IEDA	Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program
IESIP	Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program [formerly AESIP]
KODE	Koorie Open Door Education Project
LOTE	Languages Other Than English
MCATSIA	Ministerial Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee
NARU	North Australia Research Unit, ANU
NATSIEP	National Torres Strait Islander Education Policy [formerly AEP]
NATSIEW	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Website
NATSIS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey
NCVER	National Council of Vocational Education Research Ltd
NLLIA	National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia
RATEP	Remote Area Teacher Education Program
RCIADIC	Royal Commission Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
SAAETAC	South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee
SAE	Standard Australian English
SSABSA	Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia
TAEA	Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association
TRA	Training Reform Agenda
TSRA	Torres Strait Regional Authority
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
VEGAS	Vocational and Educational Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme
VET	Vocational education and training